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Irtysh River in North Xinjiang

## Pilgrimage to Northwest Sichuan Monasteries

Pei Ieoh Ming's Ultimate Swan Song

## Suzhou Museum

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Nov/Dec 2007

# 312 Contents

5 From the Editor

**Journey of Life**

6 Quest on Travel

**Quest on the Flying White Whale**

Article • Richard Quest

8 Travel Notes

10 Photography I

**Golden Photography Route of Inner Mongolia**

Photos • Yang Xiao Article • Stephen Or

16 Feature Story I

**Pilgrimage to Northwest Sichuan Monasteries**

Photos • Lin Jinghua, Xie Guanghui Article • Stephen Or

Our trip covered the northwest corner of Sichuan, including Markam, Sêrtar, Garzê, Maniganggo, Dêrgê and Palyul. Only a few tourists come here; most visitors are simply passing through on their way to Tibet. In fact the landscape, religion, culture and local customs are quite unique and worth a special visit.

48 Destinations

**World Heritage in China, A New Tourist Star**

Edited by Cindy Lam

52 Culture

**Pei Ieoh Ming's Ultimate Swan Song – Suzhou Museum**

Photos & Article • Xie Guanghui

58 On the Way

**A World of Learning in Yunnan**

Photos & Article • Li Zhixiong

70 Highlights

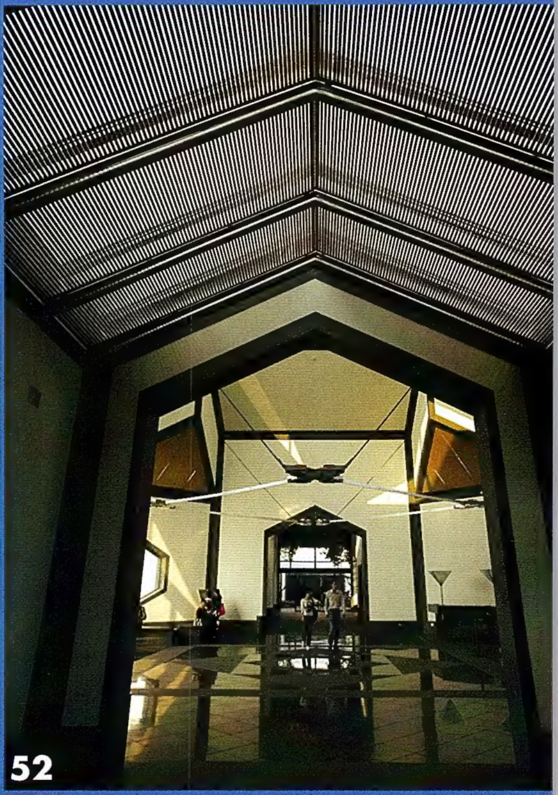
**A Fresh Tour through the Ancient Capitals of Henan**

Photos & Article • Ma Yiu Chun

78 Customs

**Zhouxi – the Place to Experience**

Photos • Zheng Yunfeng Article • Pan Jiang



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Welcome to the Phoenix City Hotel, Guangzhou !

Nov/Dec 2007

# 312 Contents

**84** Excursions I

### Having Fun by the Sea in Nan'ao

Photos & Article • Xie Liaosha

**90** Feature Story II

### Towards the Arctic – Exploring the Source of the Irtysh River in North Xinjiang

Photos & Article • Xie Guanghui

Generally, rivers run into the sea. This is not the case in Xinjiang. Located in the heartland of Eurasia, Xinjiang is far from the sea. With scarce rainfall and strong radiation, the climate is extremely dry. Long before the rivers reach the ocean, they have dried up.

**118** Photography II

### Photography Tour of Tianshan Prairie

Photos & Article • Huang Songhui

**124** Profile

### Tan Baoshuo's Soul-searching Travel

Photos & Article • Chan Yat Nin

Tan Baoshuo has been interested in playing flutes and making flutes since he was young. After we grew up, we began to live our own lives and rarely saw each other. Not until the past few years when I often went to see his show did I reunite with him. Today, he has become an expert in many fields. He is definitely a famous person...

**128** Hotel Picks

**132** Update

**134** Excursions II

### Weekend Tour to Yilan

Photos & Article • Mickey Ching

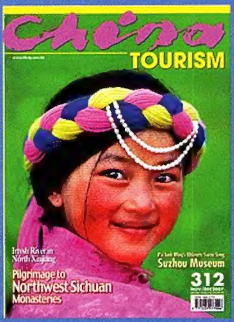
**138** Culinary Delights

### Tasty Lanzhou Noodles

Photos & Article • Wu Pingguan

**141** Calendar

**144** Next Issue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Pilgrimage to Northwest Sichuan Monasteries
Suzhou Museum
312

Cover: A Beautiful Kangba girl .
(by Lin Jinghua)

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# Journey of Life

Summer has come and gone, and spring has given way to winter. As we come to the end of 2007, the sun rotates back to the Tropic of Capricorn and we are left to reflect on another year. We all know that life is a journey; we see hundreds of passersby every day. Seeing someone as eye-catching as our cover girl, prompts us to think about her life by looking at her eyes. Taken at Maniganggo, the picture shows the eyes of a Kangba girl and her life seems so vibrant and colourful. What about our lives?

Looking at the eyes of city dwellers on the MTR, we get a different answer. We see hundreds of commuters with dull eyes each day. Their eyes are spiritless, without focus, desperate for a rest. City dwellers live to work, glued to an office chair in front of the computer – watching the rise and fall of the Hang Seng Index.

We work so hard for these days; maybe it is time to take rest, to find something for our souls. We are longing for a real journey in life, searching for internal spiritual satisfaction. Northern Sichuan may be a haven for us. It could offer the healing hands for our lost soul, by embracing nature, appreciating the highland landscape and visiting the largest national Buddha Institute. Pilgrims to northern Sichuan can expect a fruitful trip – and balm for our souls.

And for those readers who want to release some inner creativity, we take you to Yunnan, a fantastic place to learn arts and crafts. Yunnan is a multi-ethnic city offering tie-dyeing, silverware, paper-making and pottery. So why not become an apprentice to the craftspeople of Yunnan!

by Lin Jinghua

# Quest on the Flying White Whale

Photo courtesy of CNN Article • Richard Quest

It was the sort of invitation most people would avoid at all costs: 'Please come and spend two hours flying on a plane that seats 550 – and end up where you started.' But I could barely contain my glee! Of course I accepted. It was a ticket to ride on the Airbus A380 – nicknamed the Superjumbo – over the Pyràmnàmes. I have covered the plane since its conception, but this would be my first chance to experience what flying on board the behemoth was actually like. I was not alone – 200 other international journalists were equally eager for the experience.

First, let me state the obvious. With its twin decks, this plane is big. Very big. In fact it is enormous. The main deck seats around 350 people, like a Boeing 747. However, upstairs there is room for another 200. That is effectively an A340 on top of a 747! The aircraft is equipped with first class, business class and economy seating. I sit behind the wing in economy. It is a good choice. We lift off – very quietly for a plane of this size – and catch the crosswind. The wings' ailerons waggle up and down in a demented state as the computers fight to keep the plane stable. It feels like a giant ocean liner on the waves. But then the take-off excitement is over all too quickly and we settle into an amazingly smooth cruise flight. The landing is similar – from the plane's camera we can see ourselves crabbing towards the airport at Toulouse. Again, we ride the air waves until we touch down.

So what makes the A380 so special? Is it the two grand staircases? The 15 lavatories? The elevator that can move carts between the decks? Or the fact that it can carry 550 tons (considerably more than the 747)? It is all of these things and none of them. It is the fact that a new era of air travel is upon us and no one really knows where it will lead. At the moment the A380 is a flying white whale. With only 166 sold, it is a long way from making Airbus any money.

But Airbus' chief salesperson says the plane is a 'game-changing aircraft.' Airbus forecasts the market for very large planes at around 1,600 over the next 20 years and this plane should get at least 800 orders. Since airports are more congested and air travel is growing, demand for more seats between

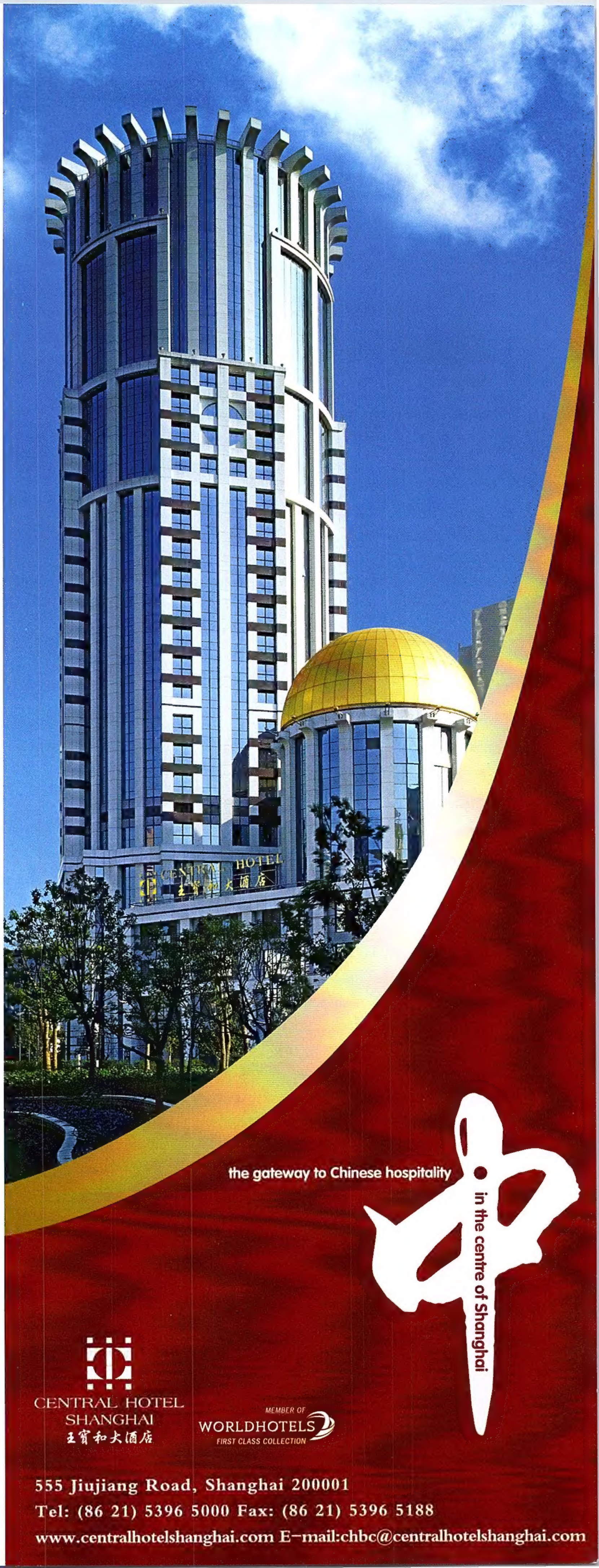
major hubs such as London and Hong Kong or Singapore and Sydney will grow. That is where the A380 comes in. (For the record, Boeing believes the Airbus numbers are all wrong, that the demand will not materialise, the plane will lose money and airlines will opt instead for their revamped 747-8 Intercontinental with a comparatively modest 470 seats.)

If airlines live up to their promises to put bars and lounges on board, the A380 could well become the standard for luxury in the sky. It could change the way people want to fly. Once the aircraft is in service on major oceanic routes, frequent fliers will want to be on board. On the other hand, with so many people on one flight, such irritations as luggage delays and congestion could cause some problems.

So will the A380 be a success? I know the arguments, and I still cannot make up my mind. We do not know yet. Perhaps history is our only guide; 30 years ago people said exactly the same things about another plane: It was too big. There were too many passengers. To step on board was to tempt fate. That plane was the 747, which went on to sell more than 1,300 for Boeing and became the standard for long-haul flight. Of the A380 experience I can say, however, that the flight was simply wonderful. To walk up and down the twin staircases, to visit the cockpit, to discover how quiet this plane could be – it was a joy for an aviation geek like me.

Because of Airbus' appalling delays, this first flight was rescheduled many times. But I did not mind. I have now flown on the biggest passenger plane in the world. Unfortunately, I know it will be a long time before the rest of you get to share the experience. But I have seen the future, and it is big.

Richard Quest is a CNN anchor and correspondent based in London. For more details on and video extracts from Richard's programs, go to www.cnn.com/quest and www.cnn.com/businesstraveller



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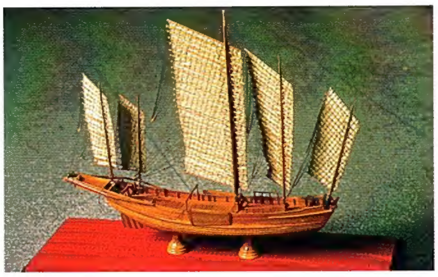

## Shanghai

### Donations pour in for China Maritime Museum

A maritime museum at Lingang New City is to be open to public in July, 2009. The musuem will cover a ground area of 24,830 square meters on the eastern coast of Nanhui District. Meanwhile, artifacts are donated by collectors and organizations. By 21 September, Shanghai has received the first batch of donations - including a rudder from a 1970s Chinese missile warship. So far, the model of the China's first merchant ship donated by The China Merchants Group topped the single biggest item. It is four-meter in length and was launched in 1872. The government is anticipating more donations to come.

## Beijing

### Airport promises improved service

In preparations for next year's Olympics, the Beijing Capital International Airport has introduced a series of new measures. One of which is sending delayed luggage on to passengers in Beijing free of charge within 24 hours. Others include setting time limits on procedures to ensure international passengers wait no more than 3 minutes going through customs and less than 10 minutes waiting for a security check.

Airlines have also promised to provide free food to passengers whose flights are delayed for more than 2 hours due to airlines' reasons, and free accommodation if flights are delayed for 4 hours due to airlines' reasons. In addition, shops promised to price their products the same as in Beijing's downtown area.

## Hong Kong

### Hong Kong Tourism Board Promotes Eco-tourism

The Hong Kong Tourism Board has introduced three new eco-oriented tours under the Hong Kong Nature Kaleidoscope Programme to provide visitors with more choices of ecologically friendly tour products.

New itineraries include the wetland tours in Long Valley and Mai Po, as well as the re-packaged Northeast New Territories Islands Hopping Tour. The tours were initially introduced by the HKTB in September 2006. After a six-month trial period of positive feedback, it was then officially launched as the Nature Kaleidoscope Programme.

## Xinjiang

### Museum Built to Protect Mini Buddhism Temple

A museum is to be built to protect a mini Buddhism temple, claimed to be the smallest in the world, from the harsh desert environment in northwest China.

Located in Qira County, southern Xinjiang's Hotan Prefecture, the Damiku Temple covers only four square metres. The temple has fine frescos of Buddhism scriptures on the four walls, and with a 65-cm-tall Buddha statue standing at the center. It is recognized as the best-preserved ancient temple in the Taklimakan Desert.

The Xinjiang archaeology team, along with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, built a 380-square-metre-museum to preserve the historic site.

## Guiyang

### Guiyang: China's Best Summer Resort Tourist City

The honor was given by China Meteorological Administration and the Meteorological Society. The evaluation noted its comfortable weather, diverse ethnic cultures, as well as the wonderful highlights by nature, including its karst limestone and magnificent Huangguoshu Waterfall.

## Xi'an

### Establish Tourism Offices in Japan

Xi'an, a popular tourist destination in Shaanxi Province, is planning to set up three tourism offices in Japan to attract more foreign visitors.

The three offices would be set up in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. Application has been submitted to the National Tourism Administration for approval. The tourism board is very confident that the plan will be approved. The proposed tourism offices in Japan would utilize the existing offices of China Eastern Airlines. They believe It would be a win-win move for both parts to attract more passengers, because 90 percent of the airline Japanese passengers to Xi'an are tourists going to Xi'an for vacations.

## Tibet

### Booming influx of tourists to Tibet

The Tibet tourism aurthority announced that more than three million tourists have traveled to Tibet Autonomous Region by September this year, which is already 500,000 more than that in the whole year of 2006. The tourists, of which 2.99 million were Chinese and nearly 100, 000 were from abroad, gave a revenue of one billion yuan (US$133 million) to the Himalayan region. The tourism bureau attributed the growth in tourist numbers to promotional efforts and the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. They expect to host a total of 3.8 million tourists by the end of this year.

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## Soon to Release Panasonic 8 GB SD and 16 GB SDHC Cards

With the expansion in the use of HD camcorders and high-resolution digital still cameras, the demand for SDHC memory cards is rapidly growing. Panasonic soon to release two Class 6 SD cards, which are 8 GB SD card and 16 GB SDHC card. With data transfer speed of up to 20 MB/s, Panasonic Class 6 cards minimize the intervals between shots and takes full advantage of consecutive shooting even with a professional D/SLR camera.

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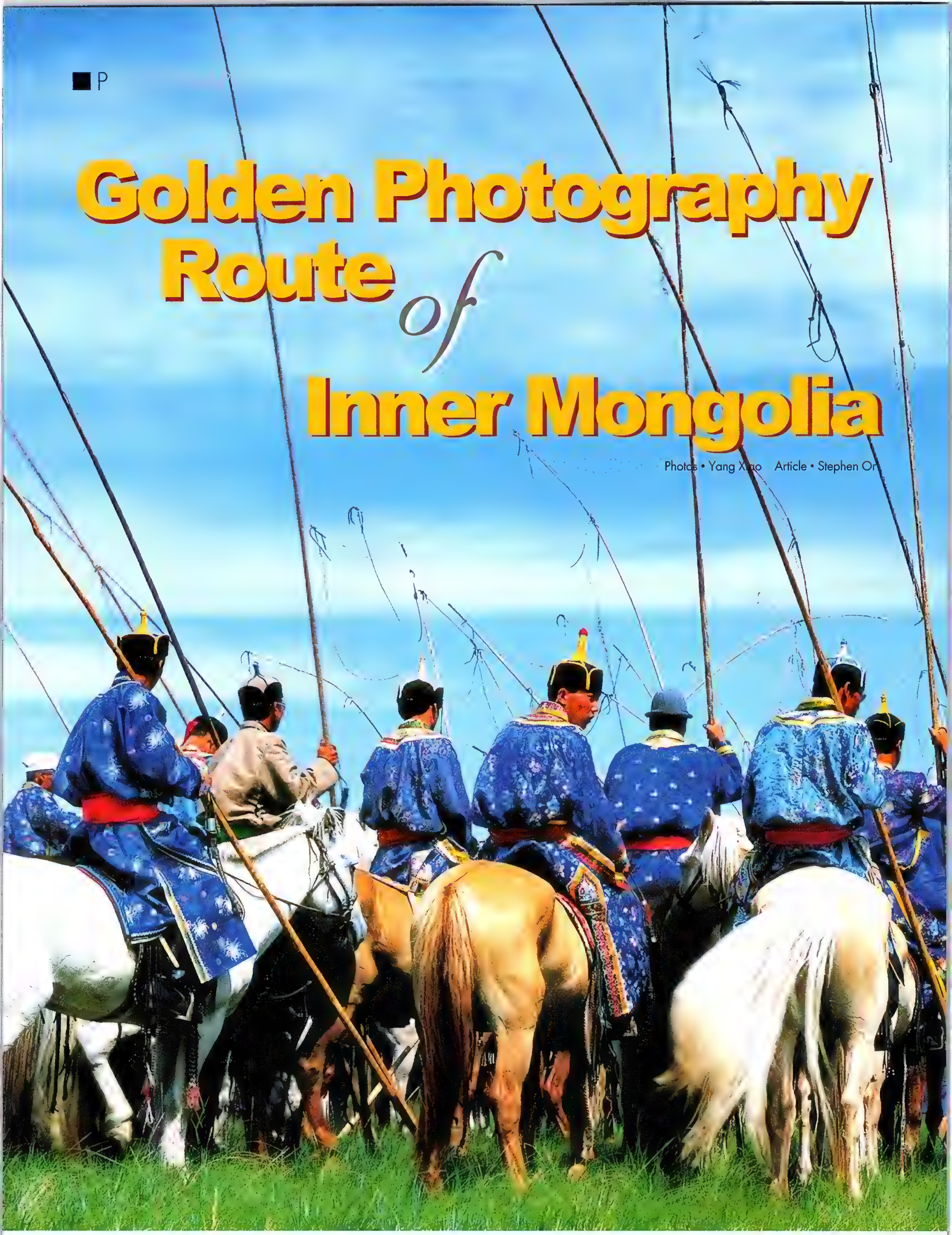


# Golden Photography Route of Inner Mongolia

Photos • Yang Xiao Article • Stephen Or

**Inner Mongolia area is incredibly vast, extending 2,400 kilometres east to west and 1,700 kilometres north to south. Only two hours after the sun has risen in the east can it be visible in the west of Inner Mongolia. The province has a great variety of beautiful landscapes, including grassland, desert, lakes and forests but you do not need to travel its entire length to enjoy them all. A golden travel route in the centre of Inner Mongolia will surely satisfy your photography dreams.**

## Itinerary

### Day 1 Hong Kong – Beijing – Hohhot (stay overnight)

### Day 2 Hohhot – Gegentala Grassland – Huitengxile Grassland (stay overnight)

First to Gegentala Grassland in the early morning to take pictures of the magnificent grassland scenery. Enjoy the local dances and songs, and other traditional sports of the Mongolian ethnic group at noon time, including horse races,sheep snatching and horsemanship demonstrations. After that, go to Huitengxile Grassland for photos of sunset and starry sky.

### Day 3 Huitengxile Grassland – Hohhot – Wudangzhao – Xiangsha Bay (stay overnight)

It is best to take sunrise pictures of the wind power station in Huitengxile Grassland, then go to Wudangzhao for photos of the temple of Tibetan Buddhism and lastly go to Xiangsha Bay for desert scenery pictures.

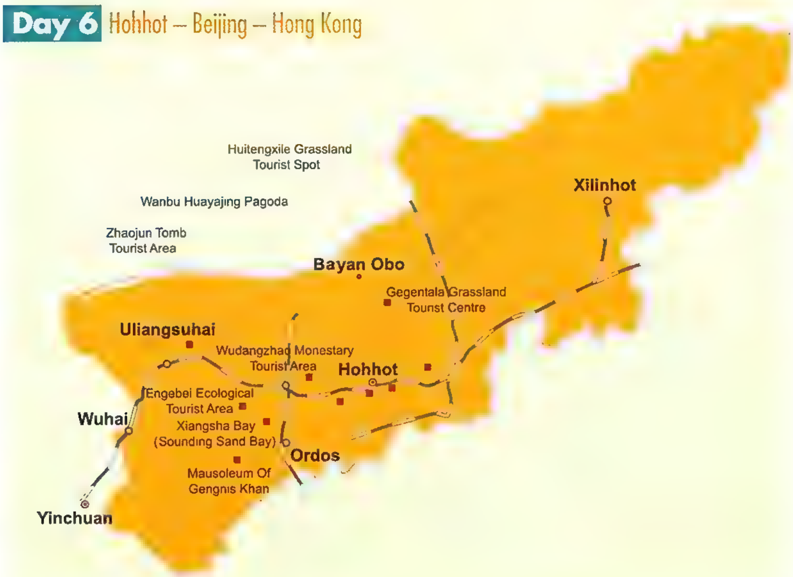
### Day 4 Xiangsha Bay – Mausoleum of Genghis Khan – Uliangsuhai Lake – Hohhot (stay)

After taking pictures of the sunrise at Xiangsha Bay, go visit the Mausoleum of Genghis Khan in the morning. In the afternoon go to Uliangsuhai Lake to take pictures of the wild swans and return to Hohhot in the evening.

### Day 5 Hohhot (stay overnight)

Take pictures of the scenic spots in Hohhot, such as the Dazhao Temple, Xiaozhao Temple, Five-pagoda Temple and the Hui Culture Street.

### Day 6 Hohhot – Beijing – Hong Kong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Wanbu Huayajing Pagoda
Zhaojun Tomb Tourist Area
Xilinhot
Bayan Obo
Gegentala Grassland Tourist Centre
Uliangsuhai
Wudangzhao Monestary Tourist Area
Hohhot
Engebei Ecological Tourist Area
Wuhai
Xiangsha Bay (Sounding Sand Bay)
Ordos
Mausoleum Of Gengnis Khan
Yinchuan

## Travel tips

Best time for taking pictures in Inner Mongolia: from mid July to early September because the grassland scenery is enchantingly beautiful and the Nadam Festival is held annually during this period. In autumn, the sky is clear and the air is crisp, producing fascinating scenes of a golden grassland contrasting with the blue sky.

### Clothing:

Inner Mongolia has a semi-humid, semi-arid, temperate monsoon climate. There is little difference in the summer, spring and autumn temperatures in the Yinshan river bend area. With a temperature range of 15 – 22°C from May to September, this period is the best time for visitors to travel to the Inner Mongolian grassland. It is necessary to bring thick clothes for the night time as the temperature can drop to around 10°C.

### Food:

Traditional Inner Mongolian food consists mainly of meat and milk products. Northern China style dishes are heavily flavoured with salt. If you are not used to eating mutton, it may be a good idea to bring some food with you but the restaurants in Hohhot, Baotou and Ordos do serve a variety of food.

### Accommodation:

It is easy for tourists to find lodgings in Hohhot and Baotou where there are various kinds of hotels. A comfortable hotel may cost about 100 yuan per person. Or you may choose one of the holiday villages on the grassland areas of Inner Mongolia and pay about 200 yuan for one night in the Mongolian yurt, campfire party included.

### Transport:

From Beijing to Hohhot, a flight from will cost about 700 yuan and a train about 180 yuan. Go to the scenic spots by a hired vehicle, about 450 to 500 yuan per day. Or you may go to Baotou or Ordos first and then hire a vehicle to go to the scenic spots. This way, you may have more choices and save some money. It is safer to do it this way.

Starting from Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, go to the Gegentala Grassland first to take pictures of the grassland and customs of Mongolian ethnic group. Then move on to Baotou area for pictures of Wudangzhao Monastery, a mysterious Tibetan Buddhist temple, and wild swans in Uliangsuhai Lake. The last stop is the Ordos Plateau, where you can photograph the desert scenery in Xiangsha Bay (also known as the Sounding Sand Bay or the Resonant Sand Gorge of Yinken Desert).

## Gegentala Grassland

Gegentala means vast and bright grassland in the Mongolian language. This tourist area, 130 kilometres from Hohhot, has a boundless grassland with fragrant green grass, blue sky and white clouds. Its fairyland feeling makes people relaxed and happy, especially in the summer and autumn.

### Photo tips

Nadam Festival is held annually in July in Gegentala so it is the best time to take pictures of the local customs of the Mongolian ethnic group. In addition, small-scale performances of local dances and songs, horse racing, wrestling and arrow shooting are also given to welcome tourists and visitors. You shouldn't miss them. For pictures on the grassland, not only is a wide-angle lens useful but also a telephoto lens to get better close-up pictures of horses and cattle in the distance. In addition, a polarizer lens can make the blue sky appear even bluer and the white clouds more transparent.

When taking pictures of horse riding, it is better to use the AI Servo to focus the moving target. Generally a shutter speed of 1/15 second is used, which will result in an excellent dynamic photo.

## Huitengxile Grassland

Huitengxile, 135 kilometres from Hohhot, means 'frigid grassland' in Mongolian. Situated at 1,800 metres, it stretches 100 kilometres from east to west. Being part of the Wulan Chabu arid desolate prairie zone, it is a nice summer resort even though you may still feel cold wearing a heavy coat at night. Huitengxile Grassland has even terrain and strong winds so this is where Inner Mongolia's largest wind farm was built. Tall wind turbines amid the grassland present a very attractive scene.

### Photo tips

In summer you will find various kinds of wild flowers here. Photos with wild flowers and grass in the foreground and the sunrise or sunset behind the windmills will make an ideal picture.

Since the sun rises early in the high elevations of Inner Mongolia, it is best to find a good spot for photography the day before and get out there early in the morning to avoid missing a wonderful shot.

1. It will take you a lot of film taking pictures on the beautiful Inner Mongolian grassland in the summer. (by Yang Xiao)

2. Standing on the back of a racing horse has gained the Mongolian people the nickname of 'the ethnic group on horse back'. (by Stephen Or)

3. The sunrise scenery of Huitengxile Grassland is enchanting, especially in the summer. Due to the temperature difference between night and day, there is a wonderful scene of mist on the grassland when sun rises in the morning. (by Yang Xiao)

1. Uliangsuhai Lake is most beautiful at sunrise with reflections of the reeds on the mirror-like lake. (By Yang Xiao)

2. You can take pictures of swans, fairies of the sky, in Uliangsuhai Lake. Their flight from the lake creates a fascinating photo. (by Yang Xiao)

3. Wudangzhao in late autumn. (by Yang Xiao)

4. Camels in the glow of the setting sun in Xiangsha Bay. (Photo courtesy of Xiangsha Bay Scenic Spot)

## Uliangsuhai Lake

Uliangsuhai Lake, 80 kilometres from Baotou, is the largest freshwater lake of Inner Mongolia, with an area of 293 square kilometres. The name Uliangsuhai, which means poplar lake in Mongolian, comes from it previously being low-lying land where poplars grew. Later on, Uliangsuhai Lake was formed due to torrential flood and recession of water from the Hetao Irrigation District.

October is the best time to take pictures of migratory birds such as swans at Uliangsuhai Lake, because the lake is a stopover point. Adult swans annually arrive from Siberia with their offspring born in the summer and stay for about two months before flying south for the winter. In the spring they fly back north again. A 300mm lens is needed when taking pictures of swans because they are very sensitive and will be scared off by minor disturbances.

1

## Xiangsha (Sounding Sand) Bay

The sand of Xiangsha Bay (also the Sounding Sand/Resonant Sand Gorge of Yinken Desert) produces a variety of sounds. In this scenic area, a 500-metre sand bay in the shape of crescent moon and a 110-metre high sand dune with a 40–degree slope form a large sand echo wall. Walking on the sand on a dry clear day one can hear sounds. Sliding down from the top of the sand dune the sound may resemble a beating drum, blowing trumpet or rumbling engine. There are also other activities for tourists here, including desert exploration, horse rides and camel rides.

### Photo tips

The temperature around noon is much too hot to take good pictures. The morning and evening are the best times to take pictures of Xiangsha Bay, especially half hour before the sunrise and after sunset because you will have memorable pictures with bright and beautiful colours. In addition, take appropriate measures to prevent Xiangsha Bay's fine sand getting from into your camera. And never change the lens in outdoor grounds.

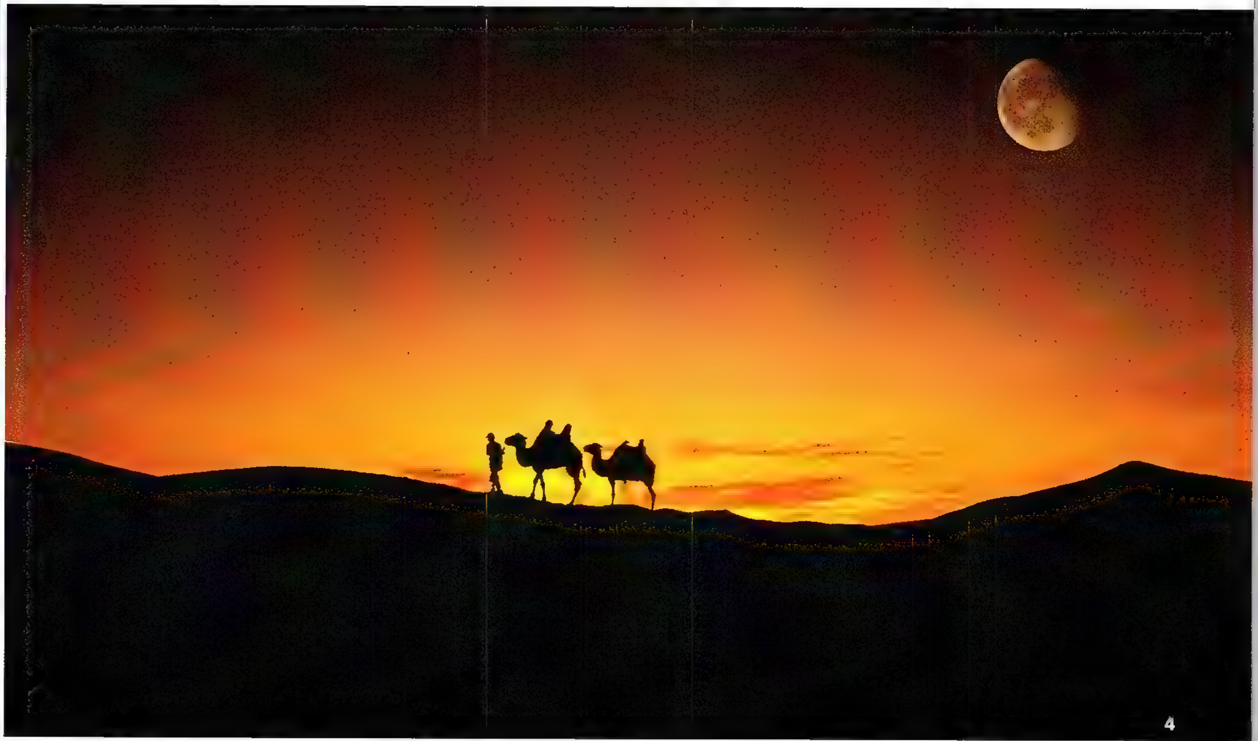
## Wudangzhao Monestary

Wudangzhao, located in Wudang Valley, deep in the Yinshan Mountains about 70 kilometres from Baotou, is the largest Tibetan lamasery in Inner Mongolia. It was built between1662 and 1722 during the reign of Qing dynasty Emperor Kang Xi (1662 – 1723) by Norbu Sanggya Gyatso, the first Living Buddha, and renovated in 1749, the 14th year of the reign of Qing dynasty Emperor Qian Long (1711 – 1799) and given the Han name of Guangjue Temple. Since it was built in a heap of sand in Wudang Valley it acquired the name of Wudangzhao.

3

### Photo tips

An annual fair is held from the 25th of the seventh month to the 1st of the eight month of the lunar calendar in Wudangzhao. One can take great pictures of various colourful religious activities during this time. All the lamas of the lamasery will chant the Mani scriptures in the daytime and in the evening they will walk around the temple holding the Buddhist wheel, blowing a Buddhist trumpet and beating drums. In addition, Wudangzhao's autumn scenery is vibrant with tree leaves around the temple turning red.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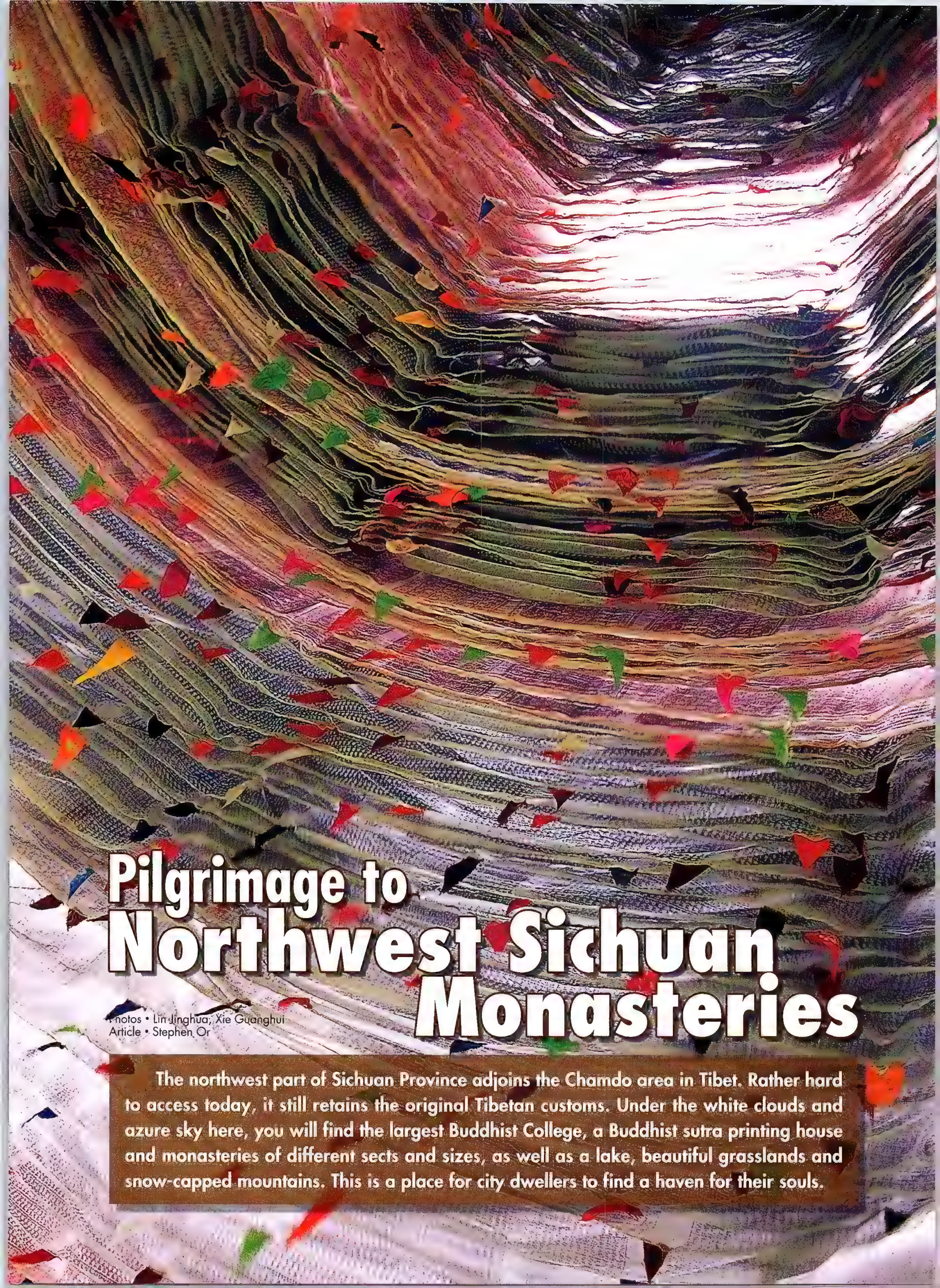


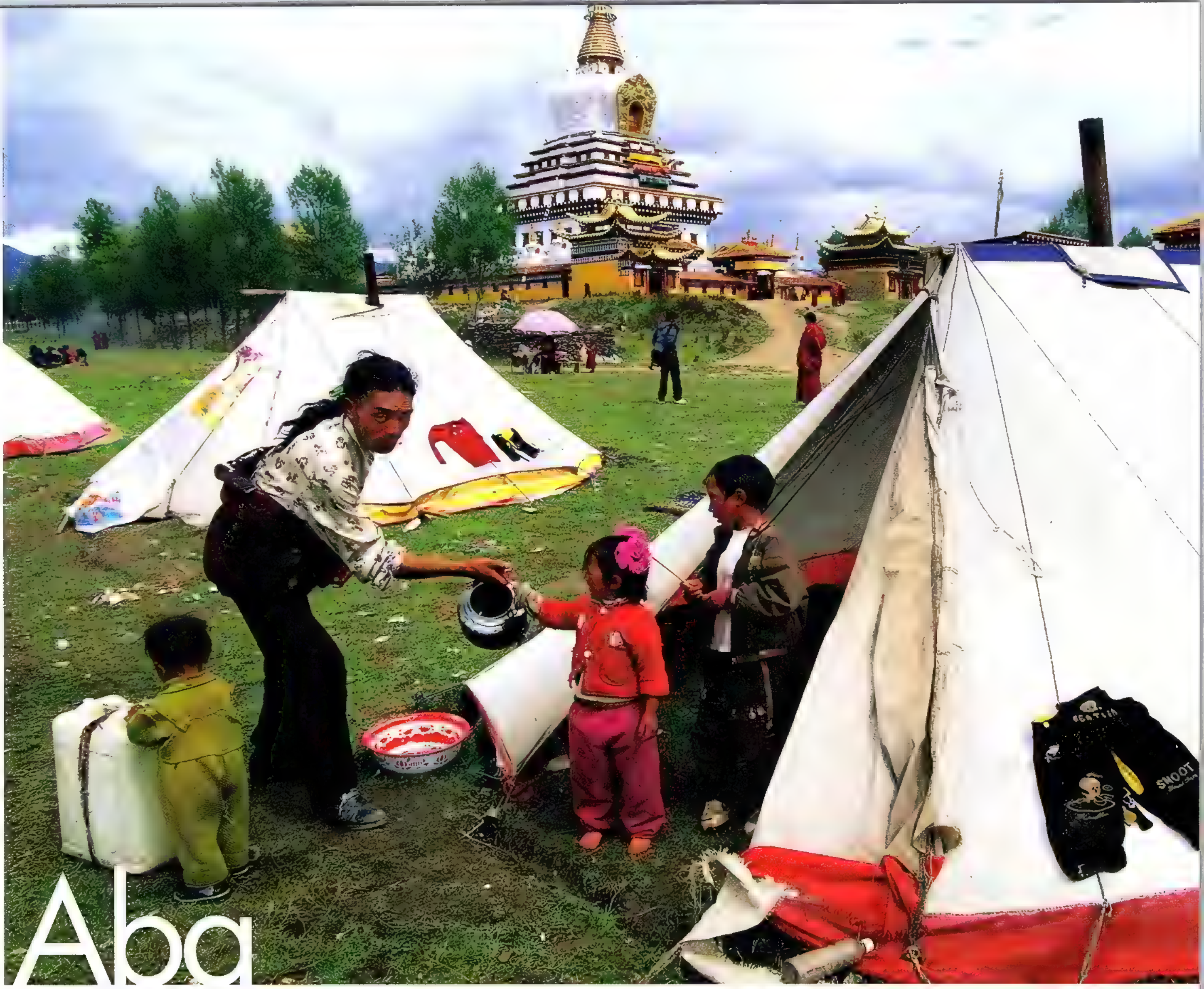
# Pilgrimage to Northwest Sichuan Monasteries

Photos • Lin Jinghua, Xie Guanghui
Article • Stephen Or

The northwest part of Sichuan Province adjoins the Chamdo area in Tibet. Rather hard to access today, it still retains the original Tibetan customs. Under the white clouds and azure sky here, you will find the largest Buddhist College, a Buddhist sutra printing house and monasteries of different sects and sizes, as well as a lake, beautiful grasslands and snow-capped mountains. This is a place for city dwellers to find a haven for their souls.

The winding road appears to float through the towering mountains, taking people towards an abundance of resources as well as warmth, joy, kinship and friendship. (by Lin Jinghua)

# Aba



1. Tibetans celebrating the Zhachong Festival on the grassland near the town's Kirti Monastery. (by Xie Guanghui)

2. Beautiful Tibetan houses in Aba, set against the grassland full of flowers and green *qingke* fields, form a uniquely idyllic plateau landscape. (by Stephen Or)

3. Nuns observing the Zhachong Festival on the grassland. (by Lin Jinghua)

Northwest Sichuan generally refers to Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture. Neighbouring Tibet, Qinghai and Gansu, the region is, on average, 3,000 metres above sea level and includes several lofty and imposing snowy mountains, including the 'King of Sichuan Mountains' — the Gangkar Riwo Mountain, which stands 7,556 metres above sea level. The well-known scenic areas of Kangding, Jiulong, Hailuo Valley, Ogshikuke Mountain, Orong, Huanglong and Jiuzhaigou are all located here. Our trip covered the northwest corner of Sichuan, including Markam, Sêrtar, Garzê, Maniganggo, Dêrgê and Palyul. Only a few tourists come here; most visitors are simply passing through on their way to Tibet. In fact the landscape, religion, culture and local customs are quite unique and worth a special visit.

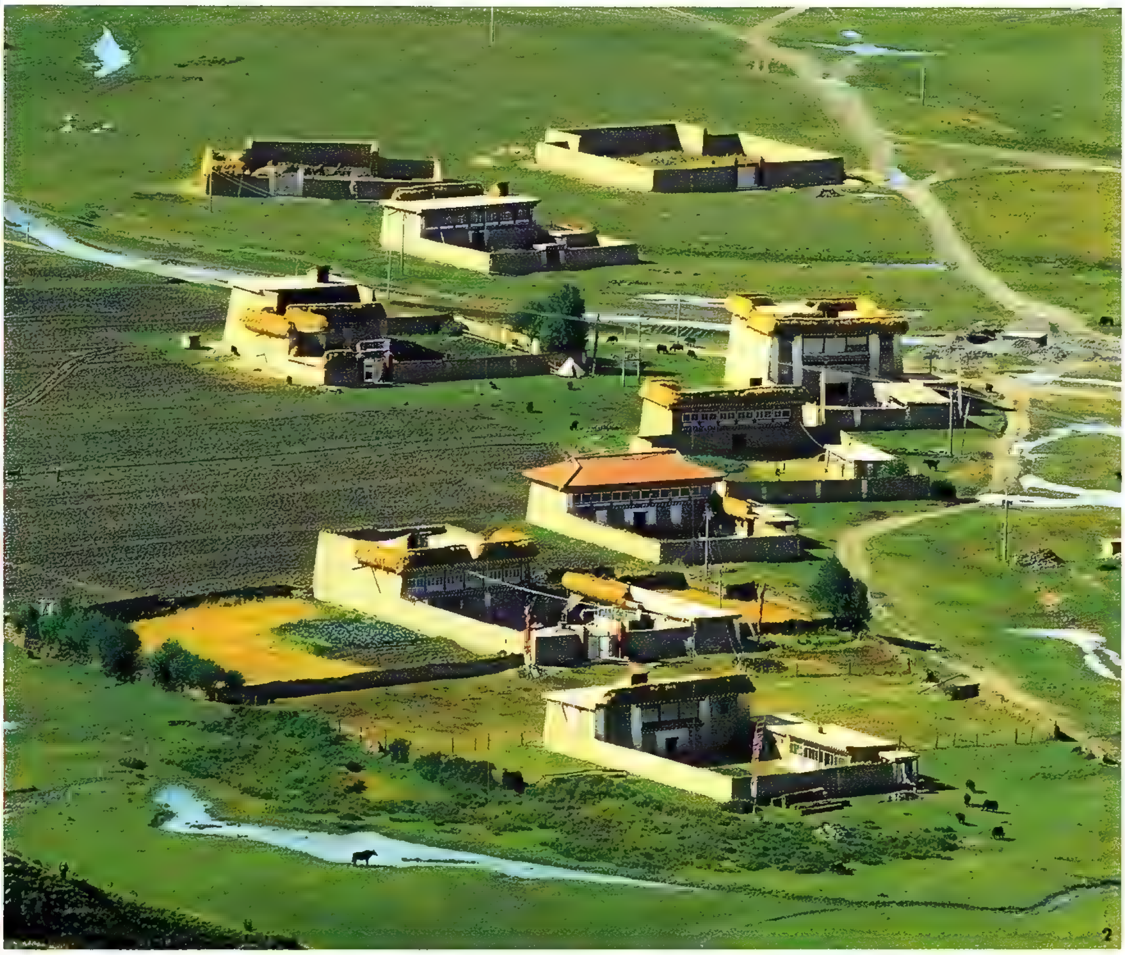
We set out from Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan Province, on a bus to Aba County in northern Sichuan near Qinghai and Gansu. Then we headed west to Zamtang, Sêrtar, Garzê and over the Mount Trola, driving for 1,800 km to reach Dêrgê and Palyul bordering Tibet.

As all the buses to Aba set off in the morning, right after reaching Chengdu by plane, I went to Chadianzi Bus Station to buy tickets and then checked in at the station guesthouse. Early, at five in the morning, the station came alive so there was no need for an alarm clock. The bus left at six sharp and reached Aba Prefecture in two hours. The scenery along the way is fabulous, with Qiang and Tibetan villages scattered here and there. It was not at all a dull drive, as the bus was either on the grasslands or going over the mountains. After 12 hours we reached the Aba County town. A taxi took me to a hotel at the crossroad of the busiest streets in town. Despite my strong curiosity after the long drive, I dared not exhaust myself in a town at 3,000 metres altitude, so I went to bed rather early.

## The Whole People Zhachong Festival

It was 20 May of the Chinese lunar calendar and happened to be the Zhachong Festival indigenous to Aba County. Originally a religious activity, it gradually developed into a folk trade fair and a popular festival for the locals to entertain themselves. 'Zha' in Tibetan means pottery, while 'Chong' means market. So this is a large trade fair mainly featuring pottery wares. The festival draws in business people from Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai.

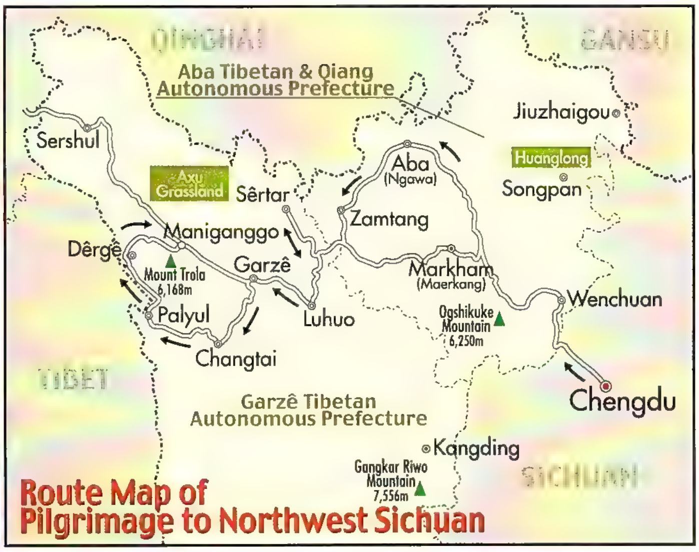
At the fair, people chant scriptures, and hold various entertainment and sports activities, like



horseracing, wrestling between different villages, and performances of the *Guozhuang dance*, a Tibetan folk dance. Nomadic Tibetans, normally scattered over the grasslands, join the town's resident Tibetans to gather with their families at the grassland near the county town. The square near the Kirti Monastery is the most crowded. It is the time when Tibetans have just planted the *qingke* barley, so they have some time to enjoy themselves in the square. Usually they would stay there for three days, watching performances during the day and performing the lively *Guozhuang dance* around bonfires at night.

## Idyllic Tibetan Villages

The most charming part of Aba would be the Tibetan villages scattered amid the fields. The earthen colour of the adobe houses, set against the fresh green *qingke* fields and the flower-covered grassland,


QINGHAI
GANSU
Aba Tibetan & Qiang Autonomous Prefecture
Jiuzhaigou
Sershul
Huanglong
Songpan
Aba (Ngawa)
Axu Grassland
Sêrtar
Zamtang
Manigango
Dêrgê
Mount Trola 6,168m
Garzê
Markham (Maerkang)
Wenchuan
Palyul
Luhuo
Ogshikuke Mountain 6,250m
Changtai
TIBET
Chengdu
Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
Kangding
Gangkar Riwo Mountain 7,556m
SICHUAN

**Route Map of Pilgrimage to Northwest Sichuan**

1. Lamas of the Gelug Sect Kirti Monastery on their way to perform Buddhist ceremony early in the morning. (by Xie Guanghui)

2. Fully dressed nuns from the Sewa Township Nunnery in a Buddhist service. (by Stephen Or)

3. The iron pole symbolizing regulations sits beside carrier bags with images of stars in the Sewa Township Nunnery. (by Stephen Or)

form a harmonious landscape peculiar to the plateau.

These plain adobe houses are worth a good look. Seen from the outside, they appear similar in terms of shape and size, yet their inside décor varies tremendously. Various auspicious symbols are painted on the smooth thin layer of mud on the outer surfaces of the firmly tamped mud walls. Their roofs are flat, providing a surface to sundry grains.

That morning while taking pictures on a slope near a mist-cloaked Tibetan village, we met a Tibetan villager on a motorbike. Seeing that we were so interested in the village, he offered to show us around. Without a word, we sat on his motorbike going into the village. The enormously loud barking of a Tibetan mastiff, which was as big as a calf, greeted us at the gate. A pure Tibetan mastiff of such build and vigour would be well worth over 500,000 yuan in the hinterland.

Upon entering the house, we were immediately astonished by its brilliant décor. The whole house seemed like a wood sculpture, with niches, chairs and cupboards all made of wood and decorated with colourful paintings and gold foil that made the whole room glitter brightly. The master, who has a jewellery business in Lhasa, comes back to Aba for a few days during the Lunar New Year and festival times, though he also owns houses in Lhasa, Chengdu and Beijing. As Tibetans are mostly nomads, following the growing grass and flowing water, they keep all the valuables on their person for travelling convenience. Their tents have nothing more than the basic daily utensils.

Located at the converging point of Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai, Aba is also where areas of agriculture and animal husbandry meet, so the Tibetans raise cattle and sheep while planting such crops as *qingke* barley here. A considerable number of them do business out of town, generally expanding to India and Nepal. With all their profits, they came back to build houses in Aba. Despite a humble appearance, each house is well worth over a million yuan.

## Nuns' Bond with the World

In addition to villages, the monasteries in Aba are also very impressive. Tibetan Buddhism was spread to the Aba area in the mid 6th century. Due to prolonged development and practice, Aba has become the area most permeated with the Buddhist culture in the whole Kham Tibetan-inhabited area. In this small town of only 60,000 residents there are 43 monasteries, which belong to five major Tibetan Buddhist sects, namely Gelug, Kagyu, Ponpo, Nyingma, Sakya, and the Jonang Sect that has ceased to exist in other Tibetan-inhabited areas.

Among these monasteries the largest is the Kirti Monastery. Located in the centre of the town, this monastery of the Gelug Sect looks more like a large school, and is the favourite place for nomadic Tibetans to send their children to study. From a very early age the children leave home to the study scriptures there. Classes begin before dawn, followed by sutra chanting. In the afternoon the lama teachers may arrange sutra disputations or more classes for them. It takes at least eight years of study to rise from the lowest rank of bhikshu, or fully ordained monk, to the senior rank. The Gelug Sect is well-known for its strict rules. When an incarnate lama is expounding the sutras on the throne, the young monks are all obedient. Only at the break time are they allowed to show their childhood naivety in the square in front of the hall.

Another monastery worth a visit is the nunnery in Sewa Township, a place of tranquility away from the world. Half way up a hill, the nunnery commands a nice view of the distant mountains, valley and stream. In summer, the whole valley is covered with green *qingke* barley, creating an idyllic village scene. The brilliant sunlight pierced floating clouds, shining like a stage spotlight, brightening now the white pagoda and village, and then the cattle on the grassland. There was a dignified, almost frozen, silence all around; the sound of sutra chanting from the distance made me feel pure and aloof from the human world.

In Tibetan-inhabited areas, nunneries have much fewer resources than monasteries as the lamas enjoy provisions from both their families and pilgrims. Life is harder for the nuns. In these areas dominant with male chauvinism, herding and housework are mostly done by women and children, so many women became nuns because they want to escape from such unequal treatment. In a nunnery, everything has to be handled by the nuns themselves, including food, clothing, transportation and even house maintenance, which involves a lot of physical labour.

The nuns had just finished their early morning class when I entered the scripture hall. Among the Tibetan nuns I noticed a Han one. Could she understand the incarnate lamas' illustration of the sutras? With that question in mind, I went for a visit to her home.

As her parents had come from their hometown to see her there were already many people in her living room. Though they didn't speak much, their faces showed a deep concern for their daughter. Besides a photo of the incarnate lama, colourful pictures from magazines and popular soap operas, and posters of some Hong Kong and Taiwan stars were hanging on the wall. Some of the photos and cassette tapes in her closet featured singers familiar to me, and some of them were popular only in recent years. At first I could not reconcile this display of contemporary times with the simple basic dorm of a nun. I used to believe that nuns should cut their connections with the earthly world and become immersed in cultivating themselves day and night in a quiet nunnery. Yet these photos of stars and cassette tapes made me understand that nuns are human beings like us. As long as they find the destination of their souls, their interest in worldly affairs likely does not matter.

**Food:** There are many Tibetan tent stores selling butter tea (10 yuan / pot), yogurt (2 yuan / cup) and typical Tibetan food on the grasslands in Aba.

**Accommodation:** Many hotels and guesthouses stand at the crossroads near Kirti Monastery in the town; Jixiang Hotel is the best (80 yuan / standard room).

**Transportation:** Aba is 509 km from Chengdu. Buses run twice a day from Chadianzi bus station (6:00am, 7:00am).

Private vans are available in the town and you can wave to stop them anywhere. The prices normally vary between 2~5 yuan, depending on the distance.

**Places of interest:** Snowy Mount Nyanpo Yutse, grassland, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries of diverse sects, and Tibetan folk residences.

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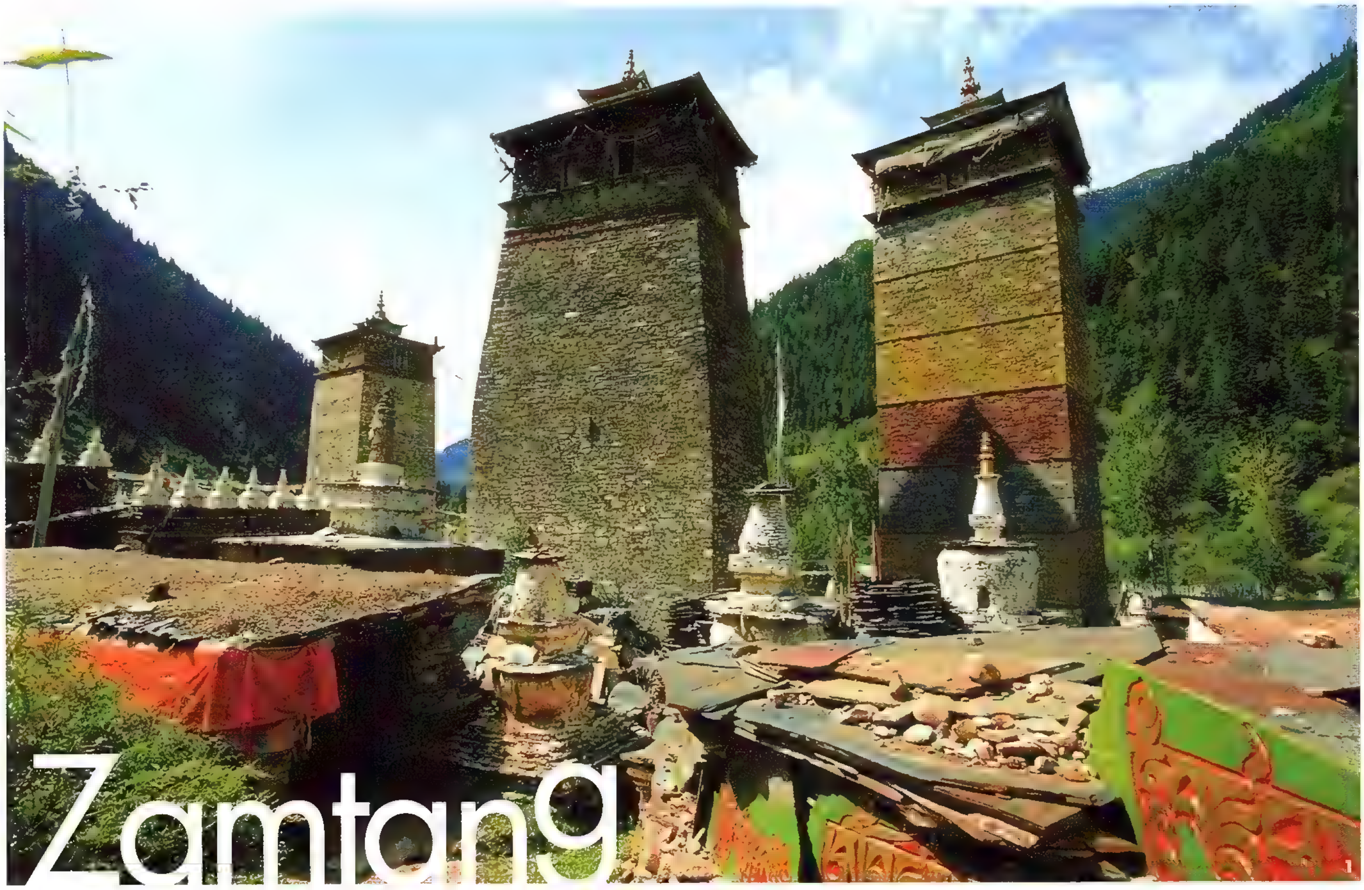


# Zamtang

Zamtang means 'God of Wealth's flat land' in Tibetan. From Aba to Zamtang, a bus runs only every other day, so to save the time we rented a van to go there.

On the way we passed the 600-year-old Bomtok Monastery, and saw over 30 Buddhist pagodas dating back to the Ming (1368—1644) and Qing (1644—1911) dynasties. Without any renovations, these pagodas looked different to the repaired monasteries, their weather-beaten, mottled surfaces showing the depths of time. Perhaps since Zamtang County Town is the most remote town in Sichuan, all the monasteries have been preserved intact and are free to visitors. They were not open to foreigners until February 2004.

Visitors to the Bomtok Monastery come mostly to worship the Yellow God of Wealth in Tibetan Buddhism, since the monastery is believed to be his domain. Besides the lofty grand Buddhist pagodas, what attract visitors' attention are the huge piles of slate sutras. Numbering close to 500,000 pieces, large and small, these slates have sutras in Tibetan carved on both sides. The carving work began in 1438 and took nine years to complete. For centuries, these slate sutras have lain quietly in this remote monastery, at the mercy of nature. Although a key cultural relic site under state protection, the monastery has been left unsupervised.

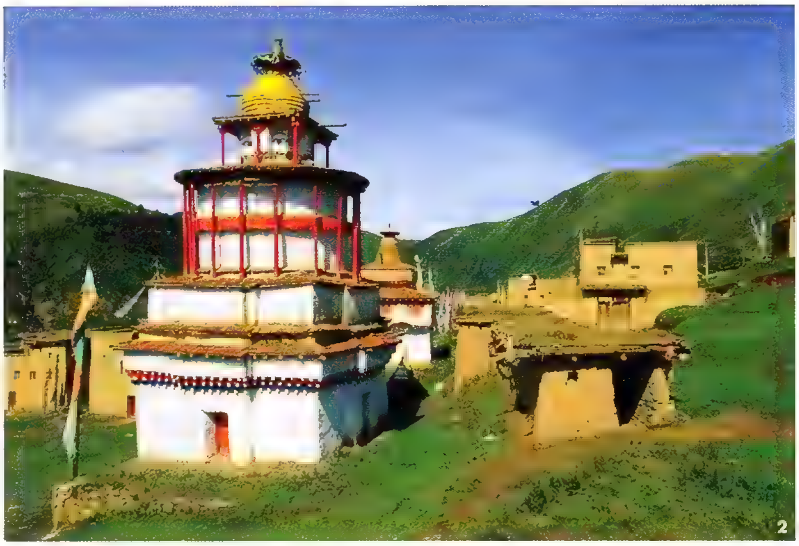
## The Disappearing Jonang Sect

Bidding adieu to Bomtok Monastery, we headed southwest to Zamtang. Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling lies within Dzamtang Township, 42 km from the county town. It comprises three connected monasteries all belonging to the Jonang Sect, namely, Dzamtang Chorje Monastery — the oldest, Dzamtang Tseju Monastery — the smallest, and Dzamtang Tsangpa Monastery — the most powerful.

Once popular in Tibet, the Jonang Sect was introduced into the Aba area in the mid 14th

1. The pagoda of the Sengke Monastery in the watchtower style is rare in Tibetan-inhabited areas. (by Stephen Or)

2. Besides numerous monasteries, Dzamtang is also known for its pagodas. The Buddha's eyes atop the pagodas are in Nepalese style, symbolizing the Buddha's ubiquitous power. (by Stephen Or)



century. Because of a difference in dogma, the Jonang Sect was later persecuted and almost disappeared in U-Tsang, only to be preserved in the tucked-away area bordering Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan provinces. Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling therefore became major settlements for the Jonang monasteries

With a style of its own, Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling is located in a community of over 100 households, a place known for its numerous monasteries and Buddhist pagodas. More than 50 pagodas are scattered around the monastery, each enshrining a different Buddhist statue; among them are *Kalachakra* or the wheel of time, *Tara*, *Vijaya* or the Most Respected Head, and *Vasudhara*. The pedestals of these pagodas are formed with prayer wheel corridors, where prayer wheels stand in a circle. The pagodas are topped by a pair of Buddha's eyes, similar to the Nepalese monastic style, symbolizing the Buddha's ubiquitous power.

In the county town of Zamtang, there are only few Han people. It was such a coincidence that we met the nun we saw at Dzamtang Township (I wonder if I really have some bond with nuns, as I met them often in northwest Sichuan). I was curious and asked her why she came to practice Buddhism in such a far-off place, she replied quietly, 'By fate, just as we happened to meet.' Yes, if it is not chance or fate, what else would make us see each other at the same time and space, and the same place?

Maybe it was predestined to meet again, so in the afternoon the nun ended up sitting in our car since there were no buses going to town in the afternoon. She may be right to say that there are times when we see something that seems so familiar and amiable, touching our hearts somehow. Perhaps this is what a predestined relationship is. My Tibetan trip this time might also have been part of my destiny, to find a haven for my soul.

Sengke Monastery is on the way from Zamtang to Sêrtar. This monastery follows the traditions of the Palpung Monastery of the Kagyu Sect (popularly known as the White Sect) and the Palyul Monastery of the Nyingma Sect (popularly known as the Red Sect), since it is on the boundary between the Red and White sects. It was originally a small monastery built on top of a hill. Later entrusted by the 16th Karmapa, its Jigme Odser Lama built a nine-storey pagoda of Maitreya at Zounaranka in 1950.

3. Young monks turn the prayer wheels at the Sengke Monastery. (by Stephen Or)

4. Sutras cover yak bones. (by Stephen Or)

## The Origins of Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling

The history of the Jonang Sect in the Aba area dates back to the mid 14th century. An abbot of the Jonang Monastery built a monastery at a place where the donkey carrying Buddhist ritual instruments lay down and refused to move. This is the location of the present Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling. It is believed that the establishment of the monastery was blessed by the abundant resources of the grassland, thus naming it Zamtang, meaning 'land of the God of Wealth'. Zamtang later also became the name of the county.

The monastery's original, complete Tibetan meaning is 'lucky Zamtang, and wish-fulfilling precious prefecture'. The monastery gradually developed into three: Chorje Monastery, Tseju Monastery and Tsangpa Monastery, which share the same traditions and are all referred to as Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling. It is today the largest monastery of the Jonang Sect in China.

## Jonang Sect, Once Nearly Exterminated

In the 17th century the head of the Gelug Sect, the Fifth Dalai Lama, confiscated the property of some Jonang monasteries, and forcing its followers to pledge allegiance to the Gelug and banning the printing of its scriptures, reduced it to the brink of extermination. The surviving monks of the Jonang escaped to the tucked-away areas bordering Sichuan, Qinghai and Tibet. So, presently the major monastery of the Jonang Sect is the Tsangpa Monastery in Zamtang, Sichuan, with some 30 smaller ones scattered around Aba and Markham in Sichuan, and Qinghai's Baima, Jigzhi, Gande. In total, there are about 5,000 monks.

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**Food:** Along the street near the China Mobile store in Zamtang, there are several Sichuan restaurants; vegetables cost 15 yuan / dish and meat 20~30 yuan / dish.

**Accommodation:** The Zamtang County Government Guesthouse; 250 yuan / standard room.

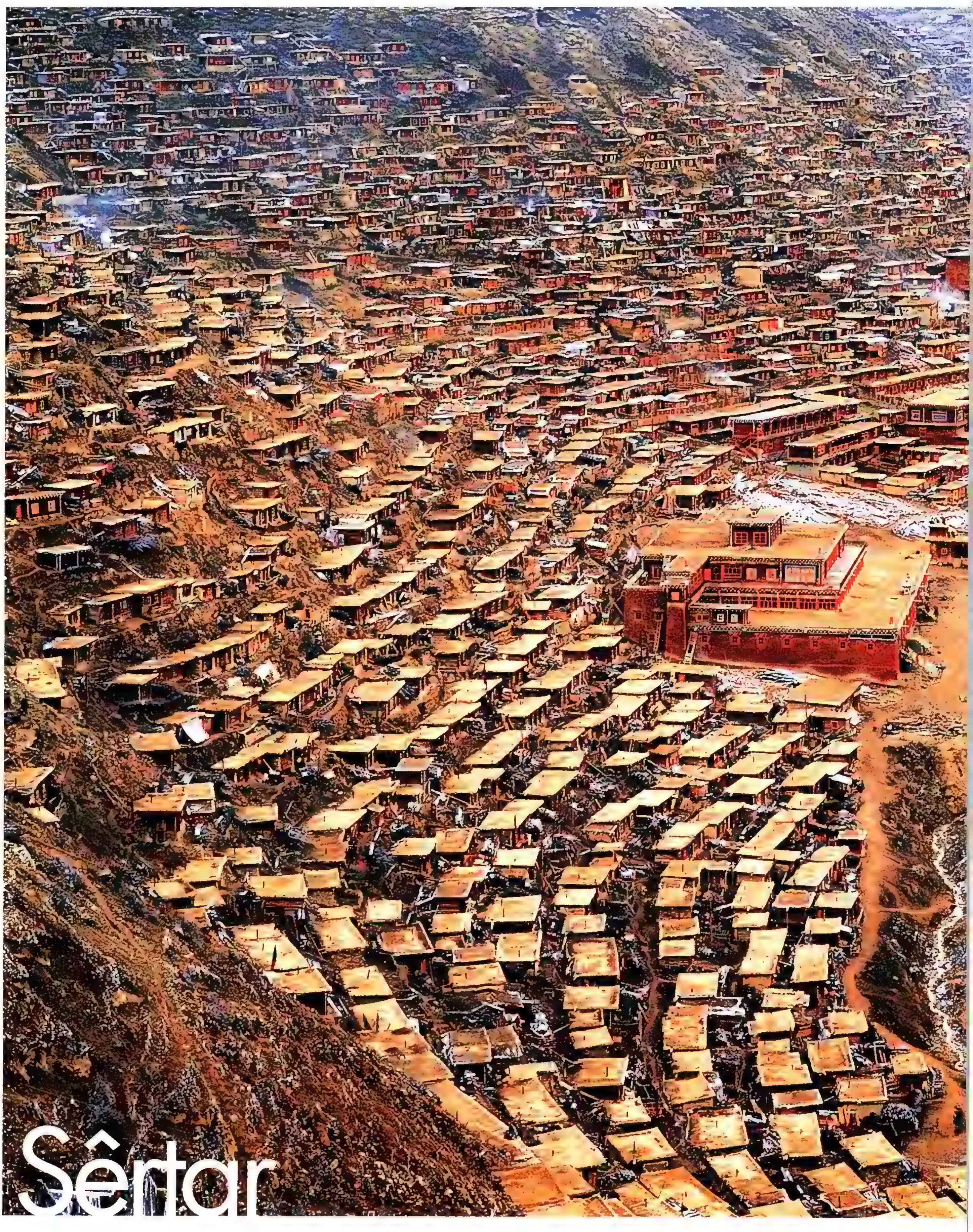
**Transport:** Buses go every day from Zamtang to Chengdu, Markham, Jinchuan, and every other day to Aba County.

To go to the Bomtok Monastery, take the Zamtang-Aba bus and get off midway.

To visit the Sengke Monastery, take the Chengdu-Zamtang bus and get off at a place 25 km from the county town.

To go to the three monasteries of Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling, take a bus near the China Mobile store; 10 yuan / person.

**Places of interest:** Bomtok Monastery, Sengke Monastery, the three monasteries of Dzamtang Samdrup Norbu Ling.



# Sêrtar

Sertar Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute. (by Wang Chen)

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Heading west from the Sengke Monastery, we soon left Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture and entered the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Garzê — the base for the Nyingma Sect. In the counties of Sêrtar and Palyul, over 90 percent of the monasteries follow the Nyingma Sect, in which the monks wear red hats and robes, even their houses and monasteries are all in bright red.

It was already dusk when we reached Sêrtar. Its county town has become almost the same as a hinterland town, as cement buildings with ceramic tiles are everywhere but the simple Tibetan style houses are nowhere to be seen. The whole town looked empty, with only a few stray dogs wandering in the street. The famous Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute was still some 20 km away, but we decided to go even though it was dark.

The institute was completely dark as it had no power supply. We moved towards the dim light atop a hill where the institute's only guesthouse is located. Electricity generated with diesel oil was available for a short period in the evening and went off right after nine. The guesthouse facilities were very basic, and plain boiled water cost five yuan a kettle. The bed sheet felt damp and heavy, giving off the odour of butter and sweat. We slept that night with these aromas.

## The Call of Buddha

Awoken by the striking of drums and gongs in the monasteries early in the morning, I opened the

1. A Tibetan was sitting in the sun outside the institute's chanting hall; with no sutras class, it was a very quiet place. (by Wang Chen)

2. With so many resident monks, the Buddhist institute's cooking pot must be as big as a basin. (by Stephen Or)

3. Monks studying in Sêrtar sit in meditation in their cabins in addition to sutra chanting every day. (by Stephen Or)

4. Monks in Sêrtar Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute contact the outside world by telephone. (by Xie Guanghui)

window in the guesthouse and saw the whole Buddhist institute below. The monks in red robes walked in lines along the paths, and wooden cabins spread everywhere from the hill top down to its foot. It was really astonishing as I had never seen a monastery with so many people and houses. I hurried out to the institute without taking breakfast, and met many monks and local Tibetans, who nodded and greeted me with smiles. There was not any solemn inspection groups around, forbidding photography, as was talked about on the Internet. Maybe it was too early for them.

Near the college there are several open caldrons as big as basins boiling meat porridge. This was breakfast for students that patrons of the Buddhist followers living nearby provided. In Tibetan-inhabited areas there is long winter but no summer, and it snows sometimes even in summer. Yet the students always sit on the ground fully concentrating on sutra chanting in all types of weathers, be it rain or a blazing sun.

The valley, stretching for many kilometres, is densely covered with cottages-dorms for tens of thousands of monks and nuns. There are many monasteries and chanting halls in the valley and on the mountain ridge, housing over 20,000 resident monks. During Buddhist service ceremonies there can be as many as 40,000 to 50,000 followers coming mostly from Tibet, though some also come from other parts of the country. Among the followers are university teachers, government officials, public security police officers, artists and celebrities, and even foreigners. What on earth has attracted so many people to study Buddhism and to receive spiritual training in this place?

I met a practitioner who came from Guangdong to study the Great Completion (a form of meditation practiced in the Nyingma School, which seeks a direct realization of one's innermost nature). I don't know what it looks like to become a Buddha, but I do know that they are leading a hard life: without electricity, they have to carry water from the foot of the mountain (now I understand why the plain water is not free); being over 4,000 metres high with a long winter and virtually no summer, they can only have few fresh vegetables they can grow around their cabins during July and August. Perhaps these people had too much suffering in their lives, prompting them to come a long way to find the 'pure land in one's heart' here.

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**Food:** Restaurants in Sêrtar County town mainly serve Sichuan dishes; vegetables 10 yuan / dish, meat 12~20 yuan / dish.

There are only two Tibetan restaurants at Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute, where Tibetan dumplings are 8 yuan / dish and Tibetan noodles 5 yuan / bowl. It is advisable to take your own staple foods.

**Accommodation:** The institute guesthouse charges 10~15 yuan / room.

**Transport:** buses are available from Sêrthar to Chengdu, Markham and Luhuo. Bus station Tel: (836) 852 2115.

**Places of interest:** The Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute, Sêrtar grassland.

### Larong Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute

Established in 1980 by Jigmed Phuntsok, the ruling lama of the Nyingma Sect, Larong Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute was originally rather small with only 32 students. Under his single-handed management, it expanded gradually and was officially approved as an institute by the Sêrtar County People's Government after the 10th Panchen Lama wrote a letter personally recognizing its establishment. The name plaque of the institute is in the Panchen Lama's calligraphy. The institute's curriculum consists of three parts: Exoteric Buddhism, Esoteric Instruction, and common culture.

# Garzê

The ground and mountains sit calmly in a vastness of white — the snow has purified the sky, the earth, and people's hearts. (by Lin Jinghua)

1

There was no direct bus from Sêrtar to Garzê County, so we had to change buses at Luhuo and make a detour. A daily Kasa Passenger Transport Co. bus leaves at about 1 pm from Luhuo to Garzê.

Since ancient times Garzê has been a transportation hub in northern Sichuan's Tibetan-inhabited area. Although there are many tourists, most of them are in transit to Dêrgê, Palyul, Sêrtar or on their way to Sershul (Shiqu) and Qinghai Province. Because of its importance in transportation, the place sees a large number of people coming and going. We were warned time and again along the way to be careful of the complexity and social security problems there. Despite the unpredictable danger ahead triggering some nervousness, it also piqued our interest, making us excited as we headed off for Garzê.

## A Bustling Border Town

Arriving in town at dusk, my first impression was that it was an incredibly lively and disorderly town which had nothing to do with 'purely white and beautiful' as its name suggests in Tibetan. The endless flow of traffic in the streets, jarring horns of cars, and Tibetan men in the streets formed a distinctive picture of the Tibetan community. Business in town is thriving, with a large supermarket, one after another gold and silverware stores and a great number of restaurants, and vegetable and fruit stalls flanking the street. You

1. Lake Kasa, by the Sichuan-Tibet highway, becomes colourful in the summer. (by Lin Jinghua)

2. Garzê, a small Tibetan-inhabited border town with numerous stores. (by Stephen Or)

3. A chance meeting with Thubgar, a Tibetan friend my colleague met 20 years ago. (by Xie Guanghui)

could hardly believe that it is a small border town.

After checking in at a hotel, we got in a taxi and headed for the Garzê Monastery. The taxi driver kindly reminded us not to come back too late, as robbery is always occurred there. We hiked up the hill nervously, hoping that robbery wouldn't happen in a monastery. Located north of the county town, the monastery is one of the 13 monasteries built by the Fifth Dalai Lama's disciples in northern Sichuan. As the monastery stands on a white stone hill, it acquired its Tibetan name of being purely white and beautiful. Later the name of the monastery was used to refer to the county and even the prefecture.

The main hall of the Garzê Monastery sits half way up the hill, below which are the dorms of the monks and the chanting hall, and above which, the hall enshrining the Buddha and the mandala stands. It is a magnificent sight to see the whole hill covered by monastery buildings, but, a pity that its outer walls were decorated with ceramic tiles in recent years, making it look weird. Compared with monasteries of other sects in northwest Sichuan, Garzê Monastery of the Gelug Sects is not unusual; its only attractive point is its square in front of the main hall, where one can have a panoramic view of the snow-capped Troklha Mountain, villages and *qingke* fields in the distance, and the old Garzê town directly below.

Walking down from the monastery I could see the old Garzê town. A key post station along the ancient Tea-Horse Road, the century-old town still possesses over 100 old houses. Wandering in it you could become lost in the ancient past. As a traveller, I was only a passenger, lost in Garzê, in my search of a haven for the soul.

**Food:** There are many Sichuan restaurants with indigenous Sichuan dishes around Binhe Road; vegetables 10 yuan / dish, meat 15~30 yuan / dish.

**Accommodation:** Hostels and guesthouses are available near the Garzê Station. Double rooms: usually 10 yuan / person. Hongfu Hotel is recommended as has a family-like atmosphere. Tel: (836) 752 1182

**Transport:** Garzê town is the largest passenger transport centre in Garzê Prefecture besides Kangding. Buses go to Palyul, Dêrgê, Sershul and Xinlong every day. Bus station Tel: (836) 752 2349. Starting price for a taxi in town is 3 yuan.

**Places of interest:** Garzê Monastery, Dargye Monastery, old Garzê town, and snow-capped Troklha Mountain.

## Meeting Thubgar by Xie Guanghui

Right after dawn, I hurried to the Garzê long-distance bus station but found the wicket was closed and the waiting room empty. Turning back at the gate I met a Tibetan man in his 50s. I enquired eagerly about the bus schedule to Maniganggo and was told it had left, at 6 am. But he comforted me, saying 'You can take a bus to Dêrgê and get off at Maniganggo.' Asked about the departure time, he replied, 'Buses from Chengdu are not so punctual.' I took the opportunity to enquire about the prices and mileages of different buses, he answered all my questions without a thought. Seeing that I was taking notes, he then became curious and asked me if I was writing a tourist guidebook and if I knew Mr. Ma Yiuchun. I looked up at him in surprise and said, 'He is the executive editor-in-chief of our press. How did you know him?' Looking excited and pleased, he answered with a question, 'Did you know that he was the first writer to come here and write about travelling in Tibet?' It turned out that he was the director of the Garzê Bus Station — Thubgar.

Thubgar recalled, 'Ma came here from Tibet that year. Because of the landslide in the rainy season, he was stranded at Maniganggo. I was the head of the bus station there and when I was free, I showed him around so he could take pictures. Only when the road was reopened traffic could I send him on his way in a truck. That was over 20 years ago.' The episode still remains quite fresh in Thubgar's memory. 'Even black and white pictures were rare at that time, so I was deeply impressed when Ma showed me the coloured ones....I didn't know that he was a Hong Kong tourism writer until I saw many tourists come here with the book he wrote.' said he.

The economy is developing rapidly in Garzê, and revenue comes largely from tourism. Thubgar also benefited from the tourist boom, as his Gold Yak Hotel near the Garzê Bus Station draws many customers every day with large-scale and top-notch facilities.

Before I left Garzê, Thubgar saw me off to a bus and said, holding my hand, 'Please tell Mr. Ma that a Tibetan friend he met 20 years ago misses him and hopes he will come to Garzê again.'

### An Amazing Unexpected Encounter by Ma Yiuchun

I was surprised and touched when my colleague Xie Guanghui came back from Garzê and told me that he met a man on his trip who clearly remembers how we met there. It is heart-warming that a man you met by chance 20 years ago and had never seen since should have remembered you, asked your colleague about you, and become excited and happy to hear of you.

I remember having a nice stay at Maniganggo. The landslide enabled me to have time to get close to the snowy mountain, grassland, river, and to know Thubgar in an unexpected encounter among thousands of people. Travelling has left unforgettable marks on my journey of life.

Maybe Thubgar's indelible impression of me is due to the fact that I sent him the pictures I took for him years ago. Tibetans are like this: they will remember you all their life if you treat them well, and they will treat you even better.

I felt my eyes moisten when reading what Thubgar told Xie Guanghui, 'Please tell Mr. Ma that a Tibetan friend he met 20 years ago misses him and hopes he will come to Garzê again.'

It's high time to visit Garzê again.

# Changtai

Awoken by the bus station's noise early in the morning, I hastened to get on a bus stopping at Changtai, mid way to Palyul, so as to visit the Yarchen Monastery. There are several snowy mountains to climb from Garzê to Palyul. Our bus wound slowly up a snowy mountain, and arrived at a rocky mountain area shortly after going through a narrow mountain pass and then downhill. The rocky mountain reminded me of Haizi Mountain at Dabba, with large tracts of stones surrounding three fairly big lakes. In this sea of stones I felt as if I were in a strange celestial body far back in time.

We got off at Changtai — a small town and a filling station for buses from Garzê to Palyul, where passengers could have lunch for half an hour. We found a van to the Yarchen Monastery, but could not figure out how far it was from Changtai to the monastery either by looking at the map or by asking the locals. Maybe it is not so well-known since it was only built in 1985.

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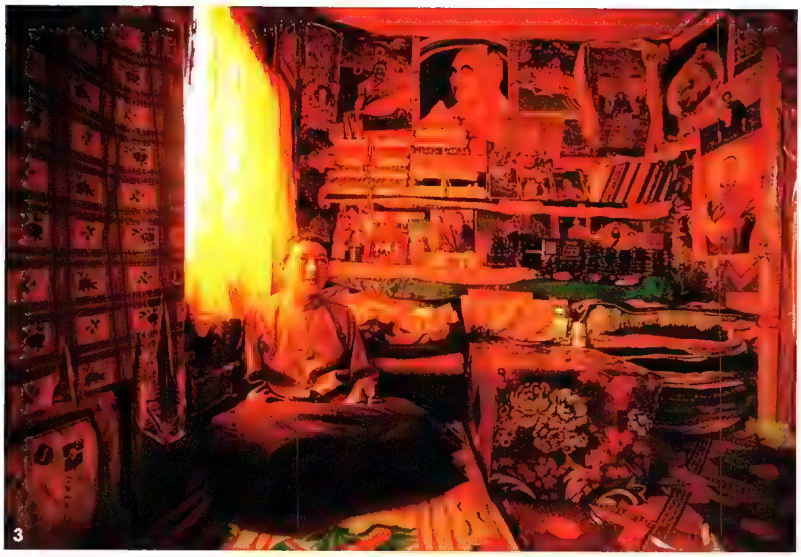

1. Yarchen Monastery is located on the marshy grassland surrounded by rivers. Thousands of cabins stretch all the way deep into the grasslands, and the monastery's whole compound is interlaced with rivers. (by Stephen Or)

2. The nuns of the Yarchen Monastery have to carry heavy pine and cypress twigs every day for cooking and keeping warm. (by Stephen Or)

3. The young nun from Baima lives in this log cabin built. (by Stephen Or)

A grassland lies not far from Changtai, which is covered with nameless flowers in summer. In less than 10 minutes our van reached a gate named Yarchen Vddiyana Meditation Monastery next to a sign '7 km'. Pointing ahead, the driver asked us to walk that way, up a slope. Along the way we saw hundreds of eyes, pious, curious, and shy, gazing at us. On their backs were heavy loads of pine and cypress twigs to be used for cooking and keeping warm.

The nuns are rather poor because, without the family provisions the monks receive, they have to rely on themselves. The Yarchen Monastery is inhabited mostly by nuns from the nearby Qinghai and Tibet areas. We met a young nun from Baima, Qinghai. Although we speak different languages, when I mentioned that I once toured her hometown Baima, she became so excited that she invited us to visit her home.

## Yarchen Monastery on the Grassland

Following the nuns, we soon got over the slope. Looking down, we were stunned to see that it was not simply a monastery, but a city — a religious city. Although we had been astonished by the Sêrtar Wuming Buddhist Institute, we were somewhat prepared for this one because we had seen pictures before the trip. Built in the valley, the structure of the Sêrtar Wuming Buddhist Institute spread out along the contour of the mountain, but the Yarchen Monastery stands on the marshy grassland, its thousands of cabins stretching all the way to the depth of the grassland, and the rivers interlace through and across the monastery's whole compound. It was lunch time when we got there. Smoke arose from thousands of chimneys, set against the golden rays reflected from the rivers. Everywhere there were nuns in maroon robes.

The young nun led us to her abode — a log cabin with the Incarnate Lama's photos hanging all over the walls. This was her living room, and chanting room and kitchen as well, very clean and tidy. Every day she goes to the monastery to listen to sutras, then returns to her cabin to chant scriptures, year after year. I would like to know why she came here to become a nun, yet I could not understand her language. Girls at her young age would be expected to be out enjoying a carefree life. Why did they choose a hard life in such a harsh environment? Being non-religious, we could barely understand the core of truth in their hearts.

## Spiritual Pursuit above Material Needs

Bidding good-bye to the young nun, we went to the chanting hall and met a Han monk on the way. Carrying a big iron box, he had just settled down there from Sêrtar. With his dark face and monk's robe, we could never distinguish him from other Tibetans if he hadn't greeted us first. Formerly a commercial designer, he came to paint at Sêrtar in 1998 and fell in love with the place. After returning to the city, he could not but feel that he belonged to this place in northwest Sichuan, so he simply gave up his job to study and practice Buddhism at Sêrtar.

Years ago, he carried all his belongings — a big iron box — to the more remote Yarchen Monastery for self-cultivation. His home is even simpler than the young nun's — a plank cabin of less than 10 sq m with drafts all around. He said that his abode was better than those of other monks which were built with wooden sticks and plastic cloth, not to say those coming from the Tibetan-inhabited areas who slept on the open ground with their Tibetan robes as quilts. To the monks and nuns, spiritual life is the most important, and the harsh living conditions are just tests to go through in the process of spiritual training. Everything in the worldly life is as transient as fleeting clouds. They place their hopes completely on the next life, thus never stop their self-cultivation and would sacrifice anything to attain the spiritual realm.

Upon leaving the Yarchen Monastery, we passed the Great Chanting Hall when thousands of nuns and monks were chanting scriptures there. Without any electricity, they could only read in the dim light of the butter lamps. In concentration their expressions were touching. Maybe we have lived for too long in the impetuous hubbub of the city, so our hearts have never been in such a harmonious calm as theirs.

**Food and accommodation:** There is no hotel at the Yarchen Monastery, so visitors could only dine and stay at the Incarnate Lama's or monks' homes, or at the Changtai town 7 km away.

**Transport:** A daily bus runs from Garzê County town to Changtai town in Palyul County. A taxi rental costs 300 yuan.

**Place of interest:** Yarchen Monastery.

# Palyul

Palyul County is located on the Jingsha River (the upper Yangtze River), facing Changdu Region in Tibet across the river. The county came about because of the popular Palyul Monastery. People who have been to Palyul all feel that it is a world of religion. Upon arrival at the monastery, which covers a whole mountain, we were again overwhelmed by the magnificence. Row upon row of halls and cabins spread out from the foot to the top of the mountain, so the monastery is visible from any part of the county town.

In Tibetan, Palyul means 'an auspicious place of virtue'. It is one of the three largest monasteries of the Nyingma Sect (the other two being the Kathok Monastery in Palyul and the Dzogchen Monastery in Dêrgê), and one of the five-clan monasteries of the headmen in Dêrgê. Chosen for its auspicious terrain, the site of the monastery was chosen and ordered to be built in 1675 by the eminent monk Rigzin Kunzang Sherab. The Palyul Monastery has over 100 branch monasteries in Tibetan-inhabited areas in Garzê and Aba prefectures in Sichuan, in Jomda, Changdu Prefecture in Tibet, and in Golog, Qinghai Province. Palyul Monastery's Incarnate Lamas hold a rather high status in all the Tibetan-inhabited areas.

It takes two hours to hike up to and back down

1. The grassland of Palyul is most charming in August, with boundless stretches of green grass dotted with fragrant wild flowers under a pure blue sky. (by Lin Jinghua)

2. Tibetan craftsmen making Buddhist statues in the Palyul Monastery. (by Lin Jinghua)

3. Palyul Monastery looks like a kingdom in a fairytale. (by Lin Jinghua)

from the Palyul Monastery, but cars can reach the square half way up the mountain. A grand chanting hall and a protector chapel had just been completed when we got there. A path further up leads to the golden top — a hall named Bronze Hill, which is said to be the abode of Master Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism, the founder of the Nyingma Sect.

It was rather late when we found a Sichuan restaurant near the hotel, and the owner and his staff were dining, so we were invited to eat with them. It was a pleasant surprise to have a feeling of home in such a remote place.

## Narrow Gap between Heaven and Hell

The owner's family came from the suburbs of Chengdu, and all his staff, cooks and waiters, were relatives or fellow townspeople. After dinner, they began to play mah-jong. A young man about 17 quietly cleared away the leftovers and then sat silently by the door, his dull eyes looking a bit sad. 'He's homesick,' the landlady told me quietly. 'All guys who just came here are homesick, as Palyul seldom has visitors except pilgrims and business people. Tourists like you are rare. It is okay during the day, but in the evening it is quiet as a grave. All stores close rather early and the only fun thing is playing mah-jong.

Palyul Monastery might look like heaven to monks and nuns, but what does it mean to the young man here? A bird cage or hell? Maybe the busy city of Chengdu is where he belongs. At the gate of the restaurant facing the Palyul Monastery, I turned back to look at the young man sitting in the corner and the landlady busy playing mah-jong, feeling that the Palyul Monastery, though physically so close to the restaurant, seemed to be in another world.

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**Food:** There are several Sichuan restaurants in the county town with good dishes. Outside the town, only Tibetan food such as tsampa (made of roasted *qingke* barley flour), beef, mutton, and yak butter tea are available.

**Accommodation:** Government guesthouse, on Hexi Street: 40~60 yuan / room.

Palyul Hotel: 40~120 yuan / room.

Shaluli Hotel (formerly Foodstuff Bureau Guesthouse): 140 yuan / standard room.

**Transport:** No direct buses are available from Chengdu to Palyul. You can change buses at Garzê County (leaving at 7 am; about 80 yuan / person). The best way is to take taxi from Garzê County to Palyul: 500 yuan / day for a Chinese 4WD ; 400 yuan / day for a van.

**Places of interest:** Palyul Monastery, Yarchen Monastery and Kathok Monastery.

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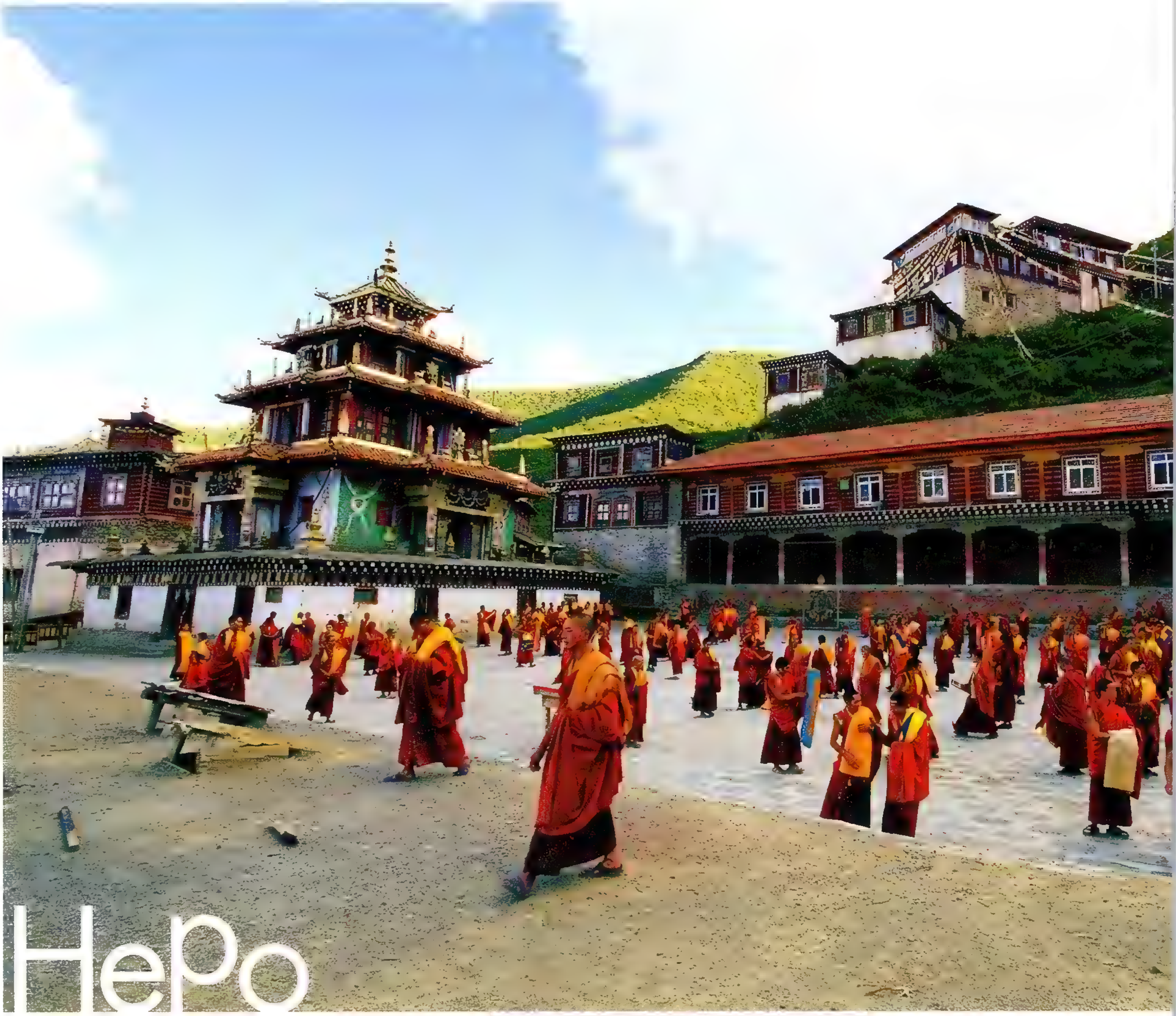
The weather on the plateau is quite changeable. The vast green grassland may be blanketed white in no time. (by Lin Jinghua)



# Hepo

1. Monks in a Buddhist ceremony in the mandala square of the Kathok Monastery. (by Stephen Or)

2. A Nepalese-style pagoda in the Kathok Monastery. The eyes of Buddha at the top, full of wisdom, gaze over the vast land. (by Stephen Or)

3. On the green grass in northwest Sichuan prayer streamers are seen everywhere, taking Tibetans' prayers to the gods. (by Lin Jinghua)

There was no direct bus from Palyul to Dêrgê, so we had to rent a car or take the mail car that runs every two days. It was almost noon when we got down from the Palyul Monastery. At the busiest crossroads in the county town we asked the drivers of many vans heading for Hepo Township if there was a bus from Hepo to the Kathok Monastery on Duoni Mountain at Bailong Valley. A rather honest-looking driver told us that some trucks carrying sand might go to the monastery and he could help us contacting the cars, or otherwise he could send us there.

## Ripped Off on the Drive to Kathok Monastery

At his 'warm' invitation, we got on his car, yet he turned out to be full of deceit. The van took many turns around the Palyul town and didn't leave for Hepo until it was overloaded. The van stopped here and there and it took us three hours to cover a distance of 38 km. No sand trucks were available at Hepo, and it was impossible for us to cover a dozen of kilometres by foot. If we stayed at Hepo overnight, we wouldn't be able to catch the mail car to Dêrgê, so we had to beg a van driver and pay the exorbitant price of 200 yuan to go to Kathok Monastery.

After bargaining with the driver, it was close to 4 pm. The uphill mountain road, only a dozen kilometres, took us over half an hour. We kept our fingers crossed that with so much money and effort, the Kathok Monastery would not let us down. Turning into a small valley mid way up the mountain, we were suddenly rewarded with a nice view of dozens of red cabins scattered around. The Kathok Monastery is not as imposing as the Palyul Monastery, but it is more elegant. A Nepalese style

pagoda stands out among the cabins, with the eyes of the Buddha, full of wisdom, gazing at the vast land. You feel touched deep inside your heart when you meet his eyes. The Kathok Monastery and the Palyul Monastery belong to the same sect and so share similar architectural styles. Yet the latter is grand and imposing while the former small and elegant. Of the two, I like Kathok more. Far from the hustle and bustles of the world, it is a dozen kilometres from the nearest market at Hepo town. We can imagine how hard it was for the pilgrims to worship the Buddha here in an age without modern vehicles.

## First Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in Northwest Sichuan

The Kathok Monastery is one of the six largest monasteries of the Nyingma Sect (Red Sect) in Tibetan Buddhism, and also the first Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in northwest Sichuan, thus deemed the birthplace of the Red Sect culture in northwest Sichuan. It was built in 1159 by the eminent monk Dengpa Dekyi of the Nyingma Sect. A legend goes that there used to be a huge stone at the site of the monastery, on which a Tibetan character *Ka* was formed naturally; thus came its name, meaning in Tibetan 'a diamond throne on top of Ka'. It is also said that Master Padmasambhava consecrated the place three times and eight other Padmasambhava masters also cultivated themselves here, so its empowerment is as strong as the diamond throne in India, as is its name indicates. Preserved in the monastery are beautiful relics of a large bronze pagoda, the statue of Sakyamuni, and engraved boards of classics as well as the precious bow and swords used by King Gesar's General Lhase Drala Tsegyal. According to legend, the precious bow was made with the nail of the claws of the *Garuda*, a large mythical bird with golden wings.

Heaven helps those who help themselves. Our heavenly-minded visit to the Kathok Monastery coincided with a Buddhist ceremony on the mandala square right after the monks finished their chanting. Over a hundred monks came out from the chanting hall to the squire, each finding his own place silently. Then their simultaneous chanting began on the spacious square and echoed through the valley, cleansing our mislaid minds. An impulse to stay with them arose from deep in my heart, to find a haven for the soul.

**Transport:** Mini-buses run 40 km from Palyul to Hepo every day; 15 yuan / person. There are over 10 km of bumpy mountain road leading to the Kathok Monastery. You may consider taking a tractor or the sand-carrying truck if you can catch one. (It costs 200~300 yuan for a round trip from the county town to the monastery.)

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# Dêrgê

Mail cars shuttle between the banks of the Jinsha River, passing the fork on the road to Hepo Township we met the previous day. After driving for over three hours, we finally reached the last town in our northwest Sichuan trip — Dêrgê. It is said to be the hometown of the Tibetan hero King Gesar, and has China's largest sutra printing house — Dêrgê Sutra Printing House.

## Most Tibetan Sutras Printed in Dêrgê

The sutra printing house is located in Dêrgê County town. Built in 1729, this 270-year-old structure has only one main hall. Though not so imposing in architecture, and appearing quite small compared with the Wuming Tibetan Buddhist Institute, the printing house has unrivalled influence in the spread of Buddhism.

There are three ancient Tibetan sutra printing houses, named after their locations at Dêrgê, Lhasa and Shigatse. The last one was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Of the other two, the one in Dêrgê is larger, and has a collection of over 830 sutras including Tanjur and 290,000 pieces of carved printing woodblocks. Eighty percent of the sutras in the Tibetan-inhabited areas came from Dêrgê.

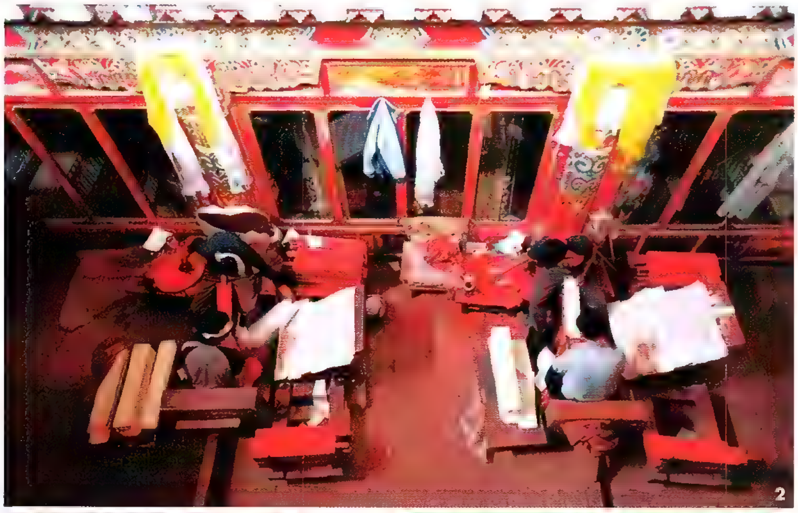
It is the favourable natural and social environments that have made Dêrgê dominant among the three Tibetan sutra printing houses. The red birch for making sutra blocks come mostly from the virgin forest in Palyul; the ink is made from the ash of the burnt bark of azalea trees growing deep in Palyul's mountains; the paper is made from the root of a kind of herb *Stellera chamaejasme* found on the Washul grassland (being somewhat poisonous, worms and mice won't gnaw at it and so it keeps a long time); and the artisans are from the most developed Tibetan Jomda area (an area previously under the jurisdiction of Dêrgê headmen before 1949).

The first place we visited in the printing house was the warehouse storing the printing blocks. A narrow passage is flanked by tens of thousands of the blocks, the culmination of the painstaking efforts of innumerable artisans over the past 800 years. There the pungent smell of the printing ink in ordinary printing houses was replaced by the smell of butter. Surviving in the advance of modern printing technology, the age-old sutra-printing technology has been preserved completely. Every step in the printing process is done by hand, including paper cutting, soaking, printing, drying in the shade, proof-reading, numbering, grinding and binding. On the second floor, the young men sat in pairs facing each other with one higher than the other, their heads bound with white cloth. One of them turned around to get a strip of white paper and put it on the printing block lying tilted between them; the other bent down and run a roller on it to produce a page of sutra. The motion went on continuously, accompanied by the rhythmic sound of breathing in a similar fashion to the riverside boat trackers' work songs that synchronize their laborious movement.

1. Masks and colourful costumes are required to perform the sorcerers' dance. (by Lin Jinghua)

2. Visitors can see the centuries-old printing process at Dêrgê Sutra Printing House. (by Stephen Or)

3. Tibetans circumambulating the Dêrgê Sutra Printing House. (by Xie Guanghui)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## Carved Sutra Blocks — Traditional Family Technology

A line of eight white pagodas lies above the printing house, and a further walk of about 100 metres will lead you to the Gonchen Monastery of the Sakya Sect. I enjoyed strolling the old lanes here.

With so many small sutra-printing shops scattering around the printing house, you can watch the printing process by opening any of these wooden doors. Most of these printing shops have been passed down for generations, and many Tibetan children start learning the carving of sutra blocks at the young age of seven or eight. A skilled artisan can complete a block carving in two days, earning 60~80 yuan. Normally these artisans' eyesight start to diminish at the age of 40 after many years of work under the dim butter lamps. I was told that in the old days it was the monks who carved the sutra blocks, so the sutras printed with the ancient blocks have stronger empowerment.

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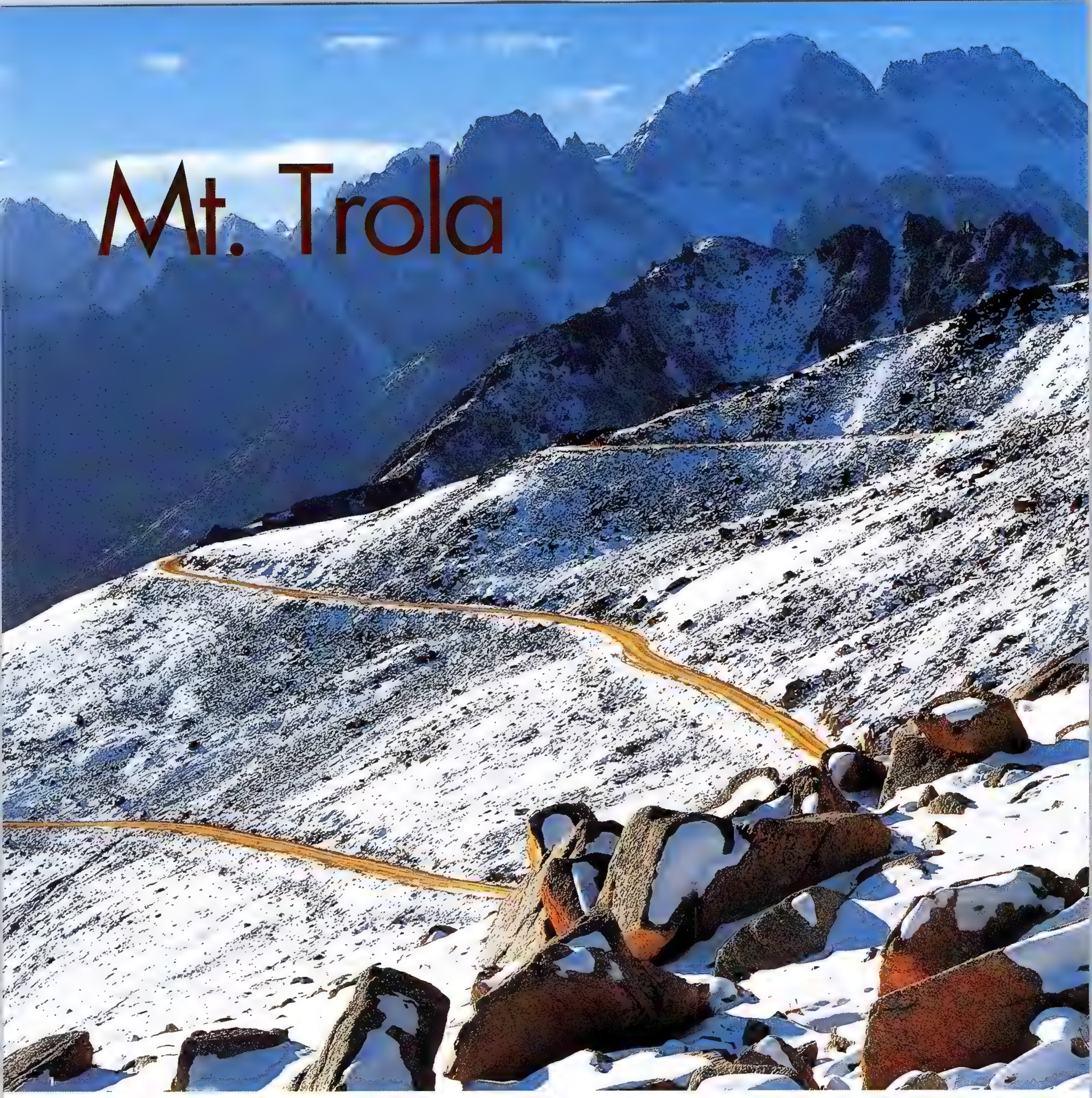
**Food:** There are many inexpensive snack bars and Sichuan restaurants on Wenhua Street leading to the printing house. Fried potatoes, hot and sour bean starch noodles, and eggs shredded in fermented glutinous wine all taste delicious.

**Accommodation:** Dêrgê Hotel (836) 822 2167 provides ordinary beds (10~25 yuan / person) and upscale rooms (180 yuan / room).

**Transport:** A bus goes to Sichuan's Kangding and Tibet's Jomda each every day. Bus station Tel.(836) 822 2167.

**Places of interest:** The Dêrgê Sutra Printing House and the Gonchen Monastery.

# Mt. Trola



From Dêrgê to Garzê one has to climb over Mt. Trola, which in Tibetan means 'a peak impassable to hawks'. Standing 6,168 metres above sea level, the mountain is snow-capped all year round with only one and a half months when it does not snow. Here one has to wear padded coats even in summer.

## Bumpy Road Prone to Accident

I didn't feel Mt. Trola's danger at first. As our bus was overloaded, I was sitting in the passage between two rows of seats and couldn't see the landscape outside. I only felt that the bus drove very slowly, swaying from side to side. Before going through the pass, when the driver asked us to walk through it, I was simply appalled by what I saw. It was by no means a road, but merely a rough rolling surface edged by a cliff on one side and on the other, a mountainside with the constant danger of fallen stones. We had to get off our bus because just before us a truck had plunged down the valley and was burning there, destroying the road. Seeing the flaming truck, I sat there, extremely worried. My heart jumped fast with the rolling road and I didn't feel at ease until we reached Lake Yilung Lhatso.

## Lake Yilung Lhatso

After getting over Mt. Trola from Dêrgê, we were greeted by Lake Yilung Lhatso (also as Xinluhai Lake), a favourite lake of King Gesar's concubine. Formed from a glacier below the major peak of Mt. Trola, Yilung Lhatso means 'falling in love with the divine lake' in Tibetan. Legend has it that in the *Epic of King Gesar*, the king's favourite concubine Drumo came to the lake and was so amazed by its beautiful scenery and quiet surroundings that she was reluctant to part with it. Later people named the lake Yilung Lhatso in her memory. The lake's new name, Xinluhai, was given by the builders of the Sichuan-Tibet highway. Though it is easier to remember, it has lost the angelic charm, so I prefer the old name.

## Colourful Ripples on the Lake

Yilung Lhatso is noted for its greyish white lakeside boulders that are colourfully carved with the six-syllable mantras. The lake is most beautiful at sunset — when the red- and yellow-coloured trees, grass and flowers on the eastern mountain slope are reflected in the lake. Enhanced by refraction from the snowy peak, the lake becomes so amazingly colourful that it seems to be in a wonderland. I lay quietly on the grass by the lake, gazing at the Mani stones engraved with the six-syllable mantra '*Om Mani Padme Hum*' and repeating it silently in my heart which, after being badly frightened at Mt. Trola, was finally set in peace.

**Food:** There is no restaurant around Lake Yilung Lhatso, so take your cooking kit or eat at Maniganggo 7 km away.

**Accommodation:** Only one camp ground is available to the left of the ticket office; tent rental is 200 yuan. You can also take your own tent and camp at designated places, with payment for the site.

**Transport:** Lake Yilung Lhatso is 98 km from Garzê County town and 100 km from Dêrgê County town. The bus from Garzê to Dêrgê passes Lake Yilung Lhatso. Or you can rent a car from Maniganggo to Lake Yilung Lhatso (120 yuan / round trip).

1. Mt. Trola, called by Tibetans 'a peak impassable to hawks'. (by Lin Jinghua)

2. Snow capped all year round, the peaks standing by Lake Yilung Lhatso are reflected on its surface, making it glitter with colour prisms. (by Lin Jinghua)

# Maniganggo

In Tibetan, Maniganggo means 'where Mani stones are carved'. Throughout the year many artisans carve Mani stones here, making Mani stones by the Lake Yilung Lhatso their masterwork. I don't know why so many Mani stones are carved here, maybe it is because of the steep Mt. Trola. As a transportation hub connecting Sichuan, Qinghai and Tibet, Maniganggo leads to Dêrgê to the west, to Qinghai's Yushu to the north passing by Sershul, and to Chengdu to the east by passing through Garzê and Kangding. With innumerable cars coming and going and the unexpected danger when climbing Mt. Trola, Tibetans carve the Mani stones here mainly to bless the travellers on their way and to release the souls of those who lost their lives in their journey.

## New 'Longmen Hostel' on Sichuan-Tibet Highway

Maniganggo feels like the Longmen Hostel (in a famous martial arts novel), as its visitors are mostly passing by it, not touring the area. They stay here only to change buses, or to take a rest have a meal.

It is destined to be a special place where all kinds of people make their appearances — drivers passing by, foreign explorers, backpack travellers, travelling businessmen, handsome Kangba men — they gather here day after day, coming and going endlessly. The small town is like a stage, on which a mixture of different people are performing together, one act after another.

It was by coincidence that I lost my heart to Maniganggo. I was waiting for the bus to Garzê the next day. As there were no well-known scenic spots around, I spent the whole afternoon strolling in the town. This is a small town with a style typical of the western region: yaks ambling slowly across the national highway, elderly women turning the prayer

1. The white pagoda at the foot of the mountain adds a touch of mysterious religious aura to the plateau. (by Xie Guanghui)

2. Artisans carving a huge six-syllable mantra. (by Xie Guanghui)

3. Tibetans performing *Guozhuang* dance to celebrate their festival. (by Lin Jinghua)

wheels around a small monastery, robust Kangba men on their motorbikes swishing by, beautiful Tibetan girls chatting leisurely in a restaurant, grasslands covered by wild flowers of all colours, and chains of snowy mountains in all directions...they work together to make Maniganggo so harmonious and peaceful.

*Translated by L. Yu*

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**Food:** The Sichuan dishes at Maniganggo are indigenous and inexpensive, as the hot stir-fried boiled pork slices cost only 10 yuan.

**Accommodation:** 10~20 yuan a person at a hostel in Maniganggo, but 30 yuan for a double-bed room at Yulong Shenhai Hotel.

**Transport:** Maniganggo is 112 km from Dêrgê County town. Buses from Kangding and Garzê to Dêrgê all stop here.

**Postscript:**

Early in the morning the noise of bus, car horns outside the window woke me up, reminding me that it was time to return to the prosperous city. The next day I had to leave the place that appeared time and again in my dreams. It seemed that the two weeks had passed in an instant, like a dream — a heavenly dream that hopefully would go on forever. If you ask me "have you found a haven for the soul?" I have only one answer: it's everywhere in northwest Sichuan, no matter whether it is Aba, Zamtang, Sêrtar, [illegible] Palyul or Dêrgê.

# World Heritage in China

## A New Tourism Star

**The 31st World Heritage Convention held in July this year proclaimed the Kaiping Blockhouses in Guangdong as China's latest World Cultural Heritage site.. For the readers of this journal, it is no surprise at all, for as early as our May / June issue, China Tourism has given extensive coverage on the site, foreseeing it as a certain winner. In addition to the World Cultural Heritage, China also submitted the South China Karst Landform for the World Natural Heritage. The site passed the appraisement process smoothly, becoming the 6th World Natural Heritage site in China.**

### 1. What Is the South China Karst Landform?

This primeval landscape is located at Shilin (the Stone Forest) in Yunnan Province (sword-like, pole-like and tower-like karst landforms), Libo in Guizhou (pyramid-shaped karst peaks), Wulong in Chongqing (characterized by the cubic Karst landscapes such as natural bridges, cracks and *tiankeng* complexities). It was formed during a period from 500,000 to 300 million years ago, and covers 1,460 square km.

### 2. What Is Karst?

Karst Landform is a general term for the ground and underground dissoluble rocks after they are eroded by water. The impact of the water's erosion on the rocks is known as the Karst Effect. Karst is actually a name for a place which has plateau of carbonate rocks in theprevious northwest Yugoslavia. It is known as Kras among the locals, and means 'a place of bare rocks'. China was the first country to conduct the earliest research on the Karst Landform phenomena: its earliest records date back to the Jin Dynasty (265 – 420), and the most detailed ones can be found in the Travel Notes by Xu Xiake, which was written by Xu Hongzu(1586 – 1641) of the Ming Dynasty.

# Yunnan

## Stone Forest of Karst Landform

**| Location |** The Stone Forest Yi Minority Autonomous County in east Yunnan Province, covering 400 square km in total.

**| Traits |** A typical example of plateau Karst landforms, this region is famous for its sharp, lofty limestone poles, on whose surface are traces of deep erosion. This is the result of the Karst Effect on the red sandstone during the Tertiary period and the basalt during the Permian period, and is the best example of a stone forest landscape in the south China Karst region discovered to date. The stone forest reveals the natural evolution of such Karst landforms from 270 million years ago. In addition, it is also the representative of the ecological system in the plateau Karst region developed in the inland sub-tropic monsoon climate.

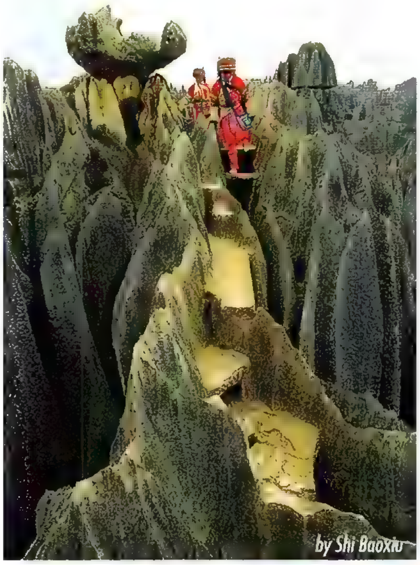
**| Charm |** Great examples of Karst landforms and their different development stages, including stone forest depressions, stone forest rock hills, stone forest slopes and stone forest basins. Fully developed Karst forms shaped-like swords and blades also mushroom- and tower-shaped landforms. As a collection of Karst landforms, it could be described as a Karst Museum.

**| Other Selling Points |** The customs of the Yi Minority customs are dominant within this scenic area. Every 24th day of June, a Torch Festival in the Yi Minority tradition will be held, with contests such as wrestling, pole-climbing and bullfighting performed during the day, and camp fires, dragon-plays, the A Xi Over the Moon Dance and the Great Three-string Instrument Dance in the evening. It is a lively event

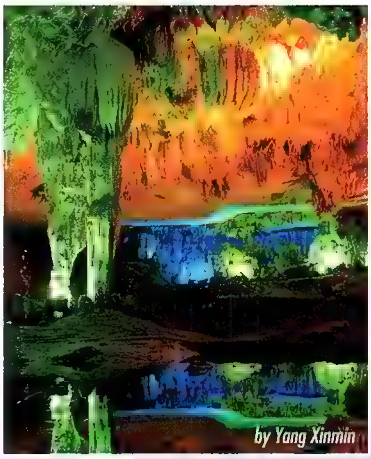
### Tourist Tips

Transport: Special tourist trains are available from the Kunming Railway Station to Shilin, and the tour takes about one and a half hours. After arrival, passengers can change to special buses that go to the Forest Stone Park.

Kunming Passenger Transport Centre Station: At the Dongju Passenger Transport Station there are buses for Luliang, Luoping, Shizong and Xingyi. Get off at the crossing, and continue on foot or by taking a small horse-pulled carriage.



by Shi Baoxiu



by Yang Xinmin

by Tam Ming

by Chen Fu

# Guizhou
## Libo Karst Landscape

**| Location |** Located in Libo County, south Guizhou Province, it comprises the Zhangjiang National Scenic Zone and the Maolan National Natural Preserve Zone.

**| Introduction |** Situated between the Guizhou Plateau and Guangxi Lowlands, visitors can see the complete spectrum of landforms here, because of its gradual transition from the plateau Karst to the lower one. This results in pyramid-shaped Karst landforms which are composed of peak-cluster valleys, peak-cluster depressions, peak-cluster gorges, peak-forest depressions, peak-forest valleys and eroded peak-forest plains (basins). These major Karst landforms are ranked in order, indicating the interactive evolution between peak-cluster landforms and peak-forest ones.

**| Charm |** The special Karst forest gives shelter to many unique animals and plants that are on the edge of extinction.

**| Other Selling Points |** Minorities make up 90% of the population of this Karst zone, including the Shui People, the Yao People and the Buyi People. The cultural diversity is simply fascinating.

# Chongqing
## Wulong Karst

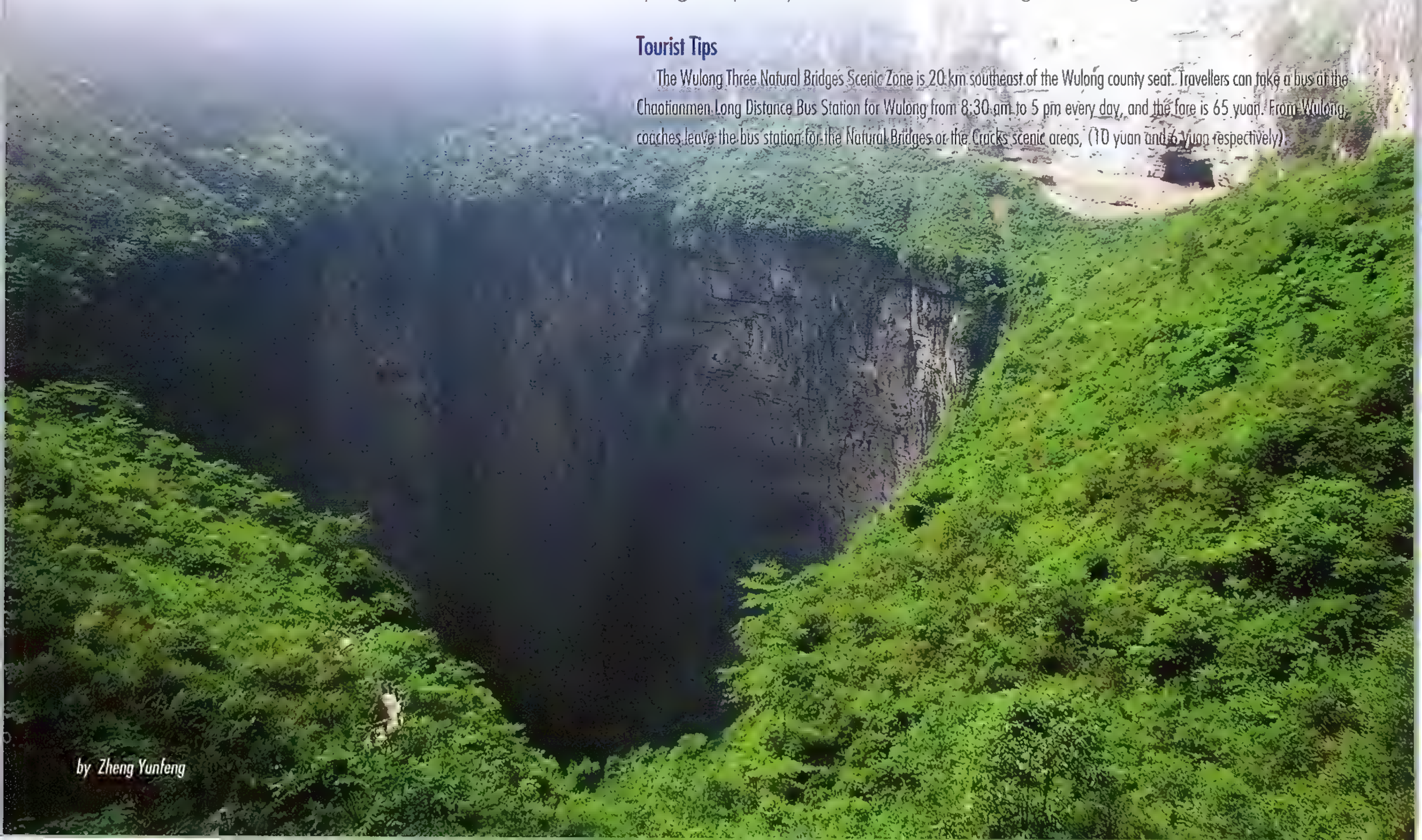
**| Location |** Wulong County in south Chongqing City Brief

**| Introduction |** One of its unique characteristics is its Lotus Cave where the rich history of geological evolution has been preserved. Here, visitors will see everything from cracks in the plains at different altitudes to deeply eroded valleys. It is also famous for its unique Karst landforms (for instance, several hundred metres deep collapsed funnels and natural bridges).

**| Charm |** Natural bridges connect the valleys to form *tiankeng*, ('Heavenly pits', giant collapsed holes). Landscape shows the Karst landform from underground rivers to springs shaped by connected caves, *tiankeng* and underground flows.

### Tourist Tips

The Wulong Three Natural Bridges Scenic Zone is 20 km southeast of the Wulong county seat. Travellers can take a bus at the Chaotianmen Long Distance Bus Station for Wulong from 8:30 am to 5 pm every day, and the fare is 65 yuan. From Wulong, coaches leave the bus station for the Natural Bridges or the Cracks scenic areas, (10 yuan and 6 yuan respectively).

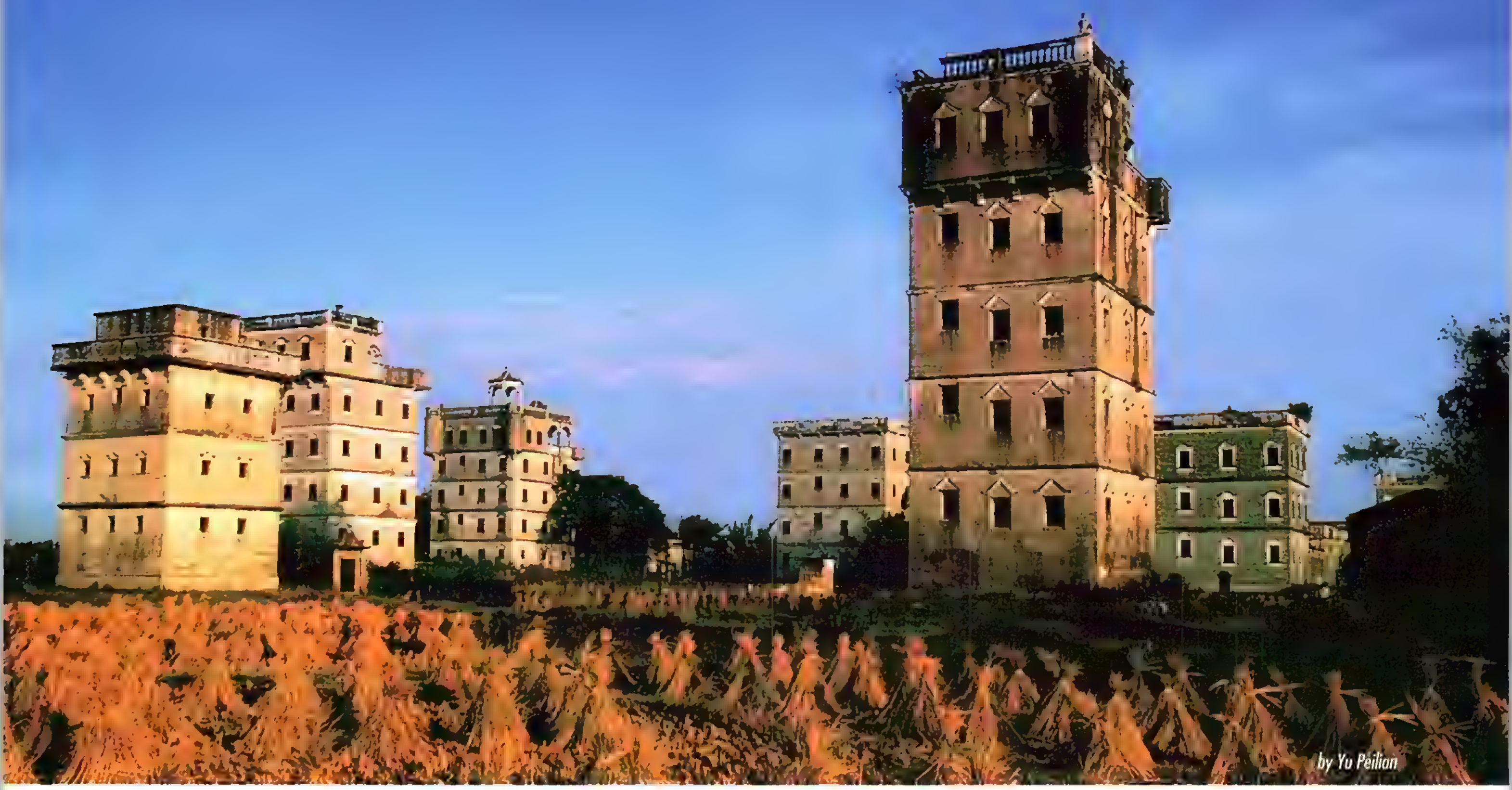


by Zheng Yunfeng

# Kaiping in Guangdong

# Watchtowers and Related Villages

The Kaiping watchtowers and related villages were recently inscribed on the World Cultural Heritage List, making the area the 35th World Cultural Heritage site in China. The site passed the appraisement and approval process with a unanimous vote. It is also the first World Cultural Heritage site in Guangdong Province, and the first in terms of Overseas Chinese culture and modern architectural culture in China. How did a cultural heritage site with only one hundred years' history excel among so many other historical and cultural sites? The answer rests in its unique value in integrating Western and indigenous Oriental styles. As a landscape, it is unique architecturally, historically and culturally. To be a World Cultural Heritage site, of course, an item has to meet at least one of the six 'globally outstanding universal values' provided by the UN World Heritage Committee. Particularly, as a cultural or natural landscape, it should be internationally valuable and be significant to present and future generations of the human race. The Kaiping watchtowers and related villages meet five of the six standards.



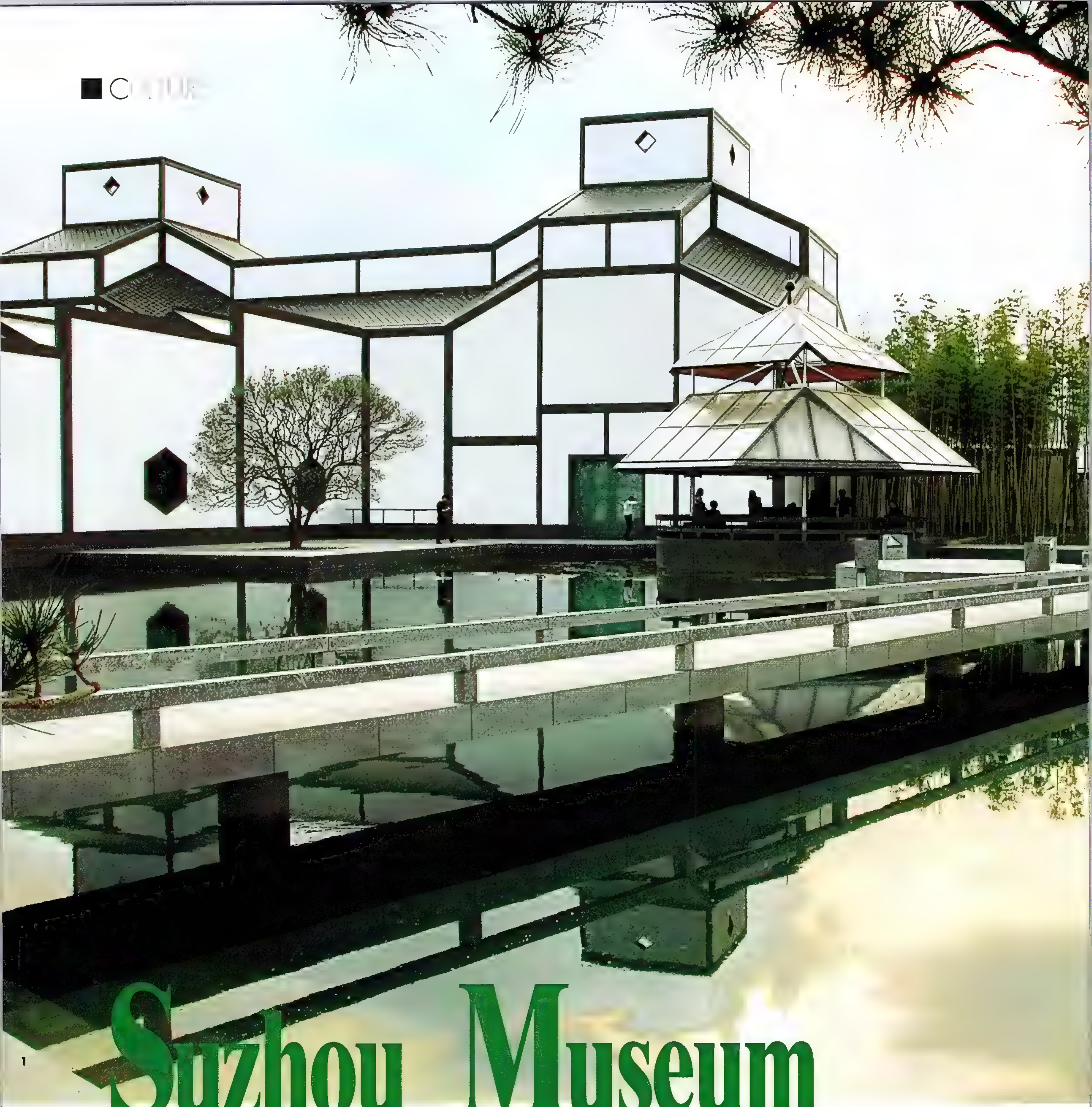
by Yu Peilian

## Lingqu Canal a Potential Contender for World Heritage List

Last December, China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage included Lingqu Canal in Gulin, Guangxi on its Preparatory List for the World Cultural Heritage. The canal is one of the best preserved water conservancy projects in the world. Lingqu Canal, Dujiangyan Dam in Sichuan and Zhengguo Canal in Shaanxi are known as the Three Great Water Conversancy Projects of the Qin Dynasty (221 – 206 B.C. ). After his preliminary survey, Dr. Jukka Jokilehto, a World Heritage appraiser and consultant of the International Relics Council, and architect engaged in protective planning, is optimistic that the ancient Lingqu Canal will be made a World Heritage site.

*Translated by Huang Deyuan*

by Chan Yat Nin



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# Suzhou Museum

## Pei Ieoh Ming's Ultimate Swan Song

Photo & Artice • Xie Guanghui

For I.M.Pei, the world-famous Chinese architect, his latest design the new Suzhou Museum in Suzhou where he spent a memorable time in his youth, is possibly his swan song. When the museum was opened to the public, it instantly became the most fashionable spot in town. The entire complex is grey and white, which complements the surrounding Chinese-style residential buildings and preserves the characteristics of southern Chinese culture.

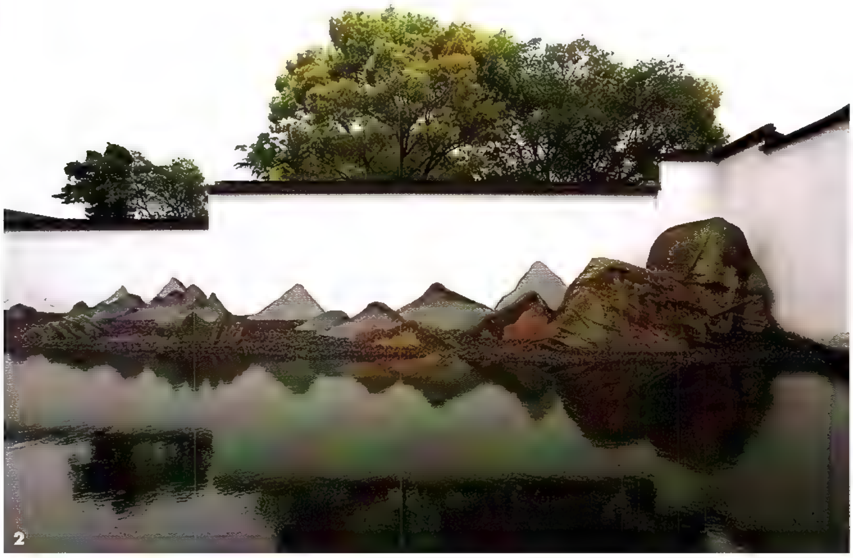
When speaking of Suzhou, people immediately think of delicate gardens and picturesque riverside houses. However, today the honour of the most attractive building must go to the new Suzhou Museum. It has attracted a lot of attention as well as argument.

The museum is located on the Pingjiang Reserve in the old city area of Suzhou and neighbours the Zhuozheng (the Humble Minister's) Garden and King Zhongwang's Residence of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851—1864). It has many of the hallmarks of Mr. Pei's earlier designs — squares, rectangles and pyramids — as well as an expansive use of glass and light. Although it's completely different from traditional Chinese buildings, it complements perfectly the surrounding southern Chinese style houses by using shades of grey and white, creating a simple and elegant style.

## Return from Retirement

Pei was born in Guangzhou, grew up in Hong Kong and Shanghai, and went to the United States for study when he was 17. He has travelled around the world, putting his bright geometric imprints on buildings in London, Luxembourg, Japan and the Middle East. His grandfather Bei Zhai'an lived on Xihuaqiao Xiang (West Flower Bridge Alley), next to the Shizi Lin (Lion Grove Garden), just a stone's throw away from the new Suzhou Museum. Pei spent an unforgettable period of time in Suzhou when he was young. He clearly remembers his grandfather taking him by sedan chair to drink tea, passing through long quiet flagstone lanes. This sweet memory has echoed in his mind since that time. Even today, he still has the Suzhou people's habit of calling a 'Liang Ting' (arbour) as 'Cha Ting' (tea pavilion). Now in his late life, he often refers to himself as a Suzhou person.

In 1996, Pei returned to Xihuaqiao Xiang in Suzhou to visit his old house and town after a gap of over 60 years. By coincidence, the day he visited Suzhou was his 80th birthday. At his birthday party, held in the Lion Grove Garden that night, he accepted the invitation to work as a city-planning consultant for Suzhou. Five years later, the Suzhou government sent a delegation to the United States to invite him to design the new Suzhou Museum. Pei, who had been retired for 11 years by then, was hoping that his sons would undertake this project. However, one year later he thought, 'If I can't do this project, neither my sons can, due to their limited



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1.This building looked very similar to the shape of the origami clothes that were popular to fold by children in Suzhou and Hangzhou in the past. Could this be an embodiment of Pei's childhood memories in Suzhou? (by Zhou Rende)

2. It is said that Pei got inspiration from the Northern Song Dynasty painter, Pei's landscape painting and imported more than 120 tons of grey and black Mount Tai stones from Tai'an in Shandong.

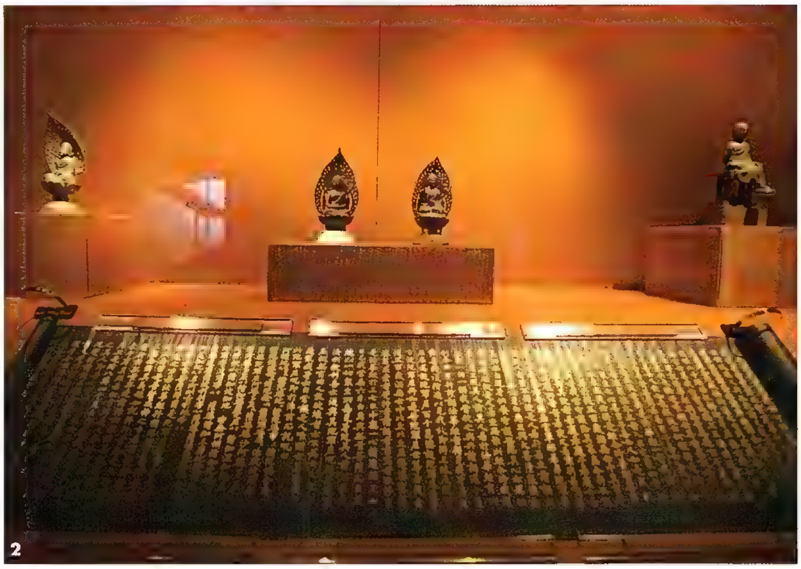
1

understanding of Chinese language and culture.' After this change of mind he decided to take over the project.

It took three years to complete the new museum. Meanwhile, Pei visited Suzhou five times, each time staying about ten days. In addition to the design of the building and exhibition areas, he was also responsible for choosing the materials and developing the garden, trees, lighting and so on. In October 2006, the new Suzhou Museum was opened to the public. Pei said, 'I only used grey and white which are Suzhou colours, but the form is modern.' The only other building he has ever designed in mainland China, a luxury hotel completed in Beijing in 1982, was a disappointment. 'I felt I hadn't done it right.' he said, referring to the Fragrant Hill Hotel, 'I wanted to make amends or to do something that will have a great impact on architecture.'

### Traditional Suzhou-style Layout

Arriving on Dongbei Street, I headed north through the museum archway revealing the Great Hall, which actually surprised me. When I entered the hall, I saw that the square and triangle ceiling frames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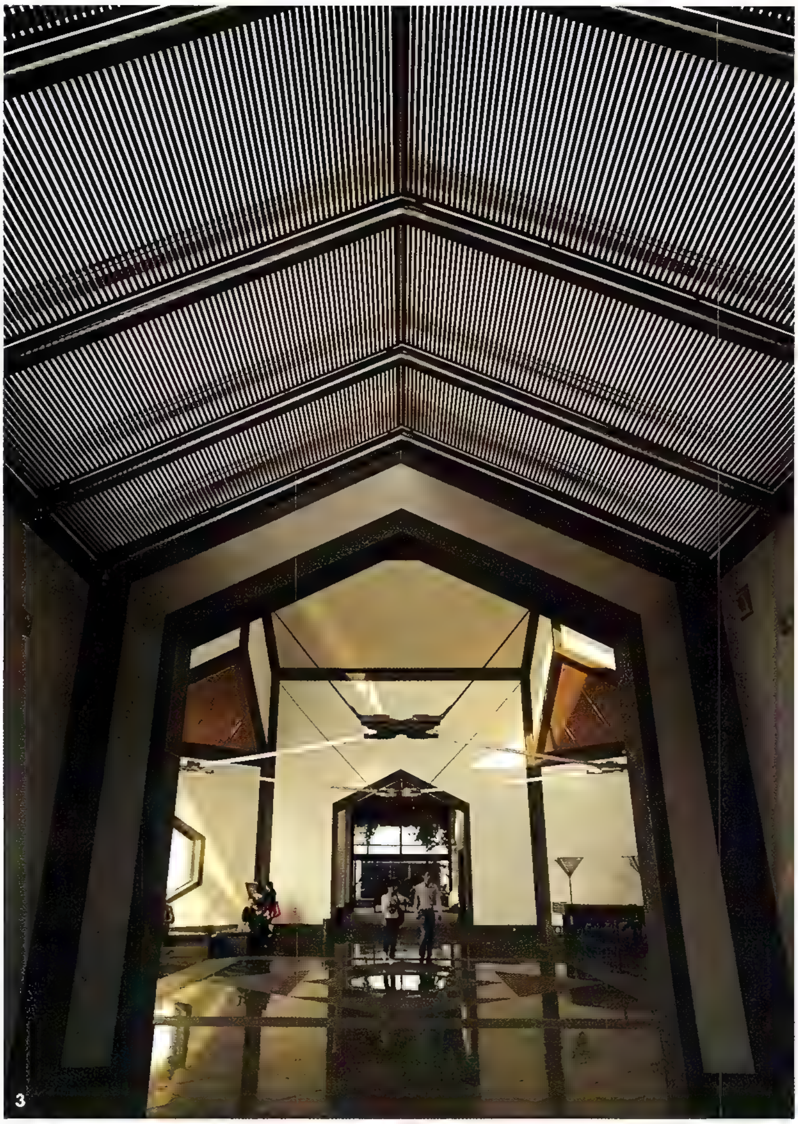
perfectly set off the geometric shaped lamp. Behind the hall is the spacious Museum Garden separated from the Humble Minister's Garden by a whitewashed wall. Against the whitewashed garden wall are thinly sliced rocks that form an image of a series of mountain peaks. They look like a beautiful Chinese painting.



1.The old entwining wisteria in the Ziteng (Purple Vine) Garden was grafted from the one planted by Wen Zhengming (1470–1559, a famous painter and calligrapher) of the Ming Dynasty in the neighbouring Humble Minister's Garden. This wisteria is renowned as a symbol of continuation of Suzhou culture.

2.The Suzhou Museum holds more than 30,000 pieces of precious cultural relics, specializing in excavated cultural remains, calligraphies and paintings from the Ming and Qing dynasties and ancient craftwork.

3.Under the peaked glass roof are wood-slatted, metal blinds through which the sun casts rays of light and lines of shadows on the white walls and ground. The shadows change with the sunlight, which strengthens the effect of the design.

4.From the Exhibition Hall of Buddhist Cultural Relics in the west of the museum, you can see the Museum Garden.

The corridors on both sides of the Great Hall stretch to the themed exhibition halls. If you stand upstairs looking down at the roof, the wood slats and the square recessed lights on the walls of the Great Hall provide a strong visual effect. A feeling of modernity abounds here.

At the end of the west corridor, on the right there are gardens and exhibition halls standing in a north-south layout, which is very similar to traditional Suzhou houses. The diamond, octagonal and other shaped windows show different views when you walk by. If you look carefully, you can see that Pei implemented some different materials. He replaced wood, the material usually used for traditional Suzhou construction, with steel and the traditional grey tiles with diamond-shaped granite.

This kind of granite is found on the border of Shanxi and Inner Mongolia, and looks grey under the sun and turns black when it is wet by rain. Having crossed the west gate, you'll see the Museum Garden consists of a cobblestone paved pond, manmade hill, footbridges and an octagonal pavilion. Over the wall in the north of the garden is the Buyuan Garden in the Humble Minister's Garden. Pei had grey and black Mount Tai stones cut into thin slices and designed the image of mountain peaks against the older, whitewashed wall of the Humble Minister's Garden. Many traditional horticulturists believed that the Suzhou gardens should use stones from Taihu Lake as had always been the case but Pei explained, 'our ancestors have done a great job in traditional gardens with a traditional way which we can hardly surpass. The famous Taihu Lake stones in Suzhou, with their varied shapes were used by my family in the past, but it doesn't work in this way any more, I'm afraid I can't follow the same path as my ancestors.' From his words, we can obviously see his unconventional thoughts.

## Objection from Horticulturists

But traditional gardening techniques have been used in the new museum. Good examples are plants that must be outside each window, water outside each door and a square courtyard between exhibition halls. These techniques are reminiscent of the Japanese Miho Museum designed by Pei in1997. Some experts criticized his design saying it didn't blend well with the garden-style Chinese buildings which should integrate more with the landscape.

During the designing process, Pei once invited some Suzhou horticulturists to a discussion. At the meeting, he politely asked for suggestions as he admitted that he knew little about gardening. Afterwards, an expert who participated in the meeting said Pei was very stubborn and in the end didn't actually take up any suggestions. However, maybe it doesn't matter that this public museum didn't follow the traditional garden style, as they are after all, different kinds of buildings.

The Suzhou Museum doesn't have an extensive collection. In the 19,000 sq m floor space, the exhibition halls only cover 3,600 sq m. As it's next to an ancient building the museum's main buildings are limited to a height of six metres. Only the halls to the west of the Great Hall are a bit taller. Zhang Xin the curator said that Mr. Pei was devoted to the design; he had a very thorough plan for the display of cultural relics, the tour and layout of exhibitions. Each tree in the museum was chosen by him. There are pine trees from Shandong, apricot trees from Guangfu, bamboo from Anji and cypresses from Rugao; as well as lotuses and laurels.

Since the new museum was opened to the public, it has become a must-see for tourists. Many of them come to visit solely because it was designed by I. M. Pei. During my visit I met two groups of young students, one of which was from the Architectural Department of the Tongji University of Shanghai and the other from the Department of Environmental Art Design of the China Academy of Art. Whilst tourists may praise the building, many Suzhou people disagree. The museum costs 339 million yuan which is a huge investment to local people. Because of this and the high quality work expected of this architectural master, people felt a bit disappointed about the final result. Criticism surrounds the Museum Garden which has been judged from the conventional idea of classical Chinese gardens and thus it is understandable some people do not like it. The pyramid made of glass and iron in front of the Louvre in Paris designed by I.M. Pei in 1989 received much more questioning and criticism than the new Suzhou Museum. The criticism toward both these constructions has been similar. He explained to the people from his hometown that this cannot be compared with the Lion Grove Garden and the Humble Minister's Garden. I suggest another argument, what is the point of simply copying and making another classical garden?

1. In the bright Ming Dynasty style study room, there are a pear tree desk from the Ming Dynasty and a 2.6-m nanmu wooden desk on which are placed writing brushes, an ink stick, paper and an ink slab. Outside the window a plum tree adds more literary charm to this study.

2. The new museum displays the sitting room of a Song Dynasty house. It is named 'A Studio of the Song Dynasty Paintings' to show traditional Chinese architectural art.

## Collection of Fine Artworks of the Ming and Qing Dynasties

The purpose of visiting a museum is to appreciate the cultural remains of bygone times. In this case, the Suzhou Museum cannot compare with those of its large neighbouring cities. However, Suzhou Museum does have some unique features worthy of a visit. Suzhou, a heaven-like city, is the birthplace of the Wu Yue (Wu and Yue are both names of ancient Chinese states) culture. It is also home to many famous scholars, especially from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Moreover, Suzhou people know how to enjoy life and a large quantity of delicate, precious and carefully designed cultural pieces have been made and preserved. Regular exhibitions include the Treasure of the State of Wu, the Wu Pagoda Treasure, Wu Craftwork and Wu Calligraphies and Paintings. The exhibited items span the years from remote antiquity to modern history, most of which are specially selected works from each dynasty. The Exhibition of Wu Craftwork displays remaining craftwork of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The new museum has a modern art exhibition hall which holds irregular exhibits of modern Chinese and foreign artworks. When I was there, the featured exhibit was 'Xu Beihong Returning to the South' which showed Xu Beihong's 48 art pieces of oil, Chinese ink, sketches, watercolour and pastel paintings. Xu Beihong's ancestral home was Yixing in Jiangsu, which is very close to Suzhou. He taught in the Suzhou Fine Arts College and thus, also considered Suzhou his hometown. The artworks of these two masters, I. M. Pei and Xu Beihong, come together and highlight the Suzhou Museum.

*Translated by Nichole Ouyang*

**How to Get to the Suzhou Museum:**

Address: No. 204 Dongbei Street, Suzhou

Opening Hours: 9am–5pm

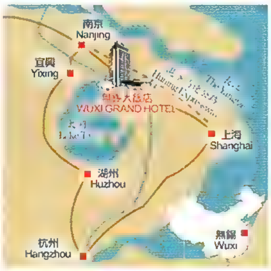
Tel: (0512) 6757 5666

Transportation: take buses NO. 1, 2, 5, 44, 5, 178, or 202 to the museum.

WUXI GRAND HOTEL
無錫大飯店

# Tasting Authentic Wuxi Dishes in Wuxi Grand Hotel

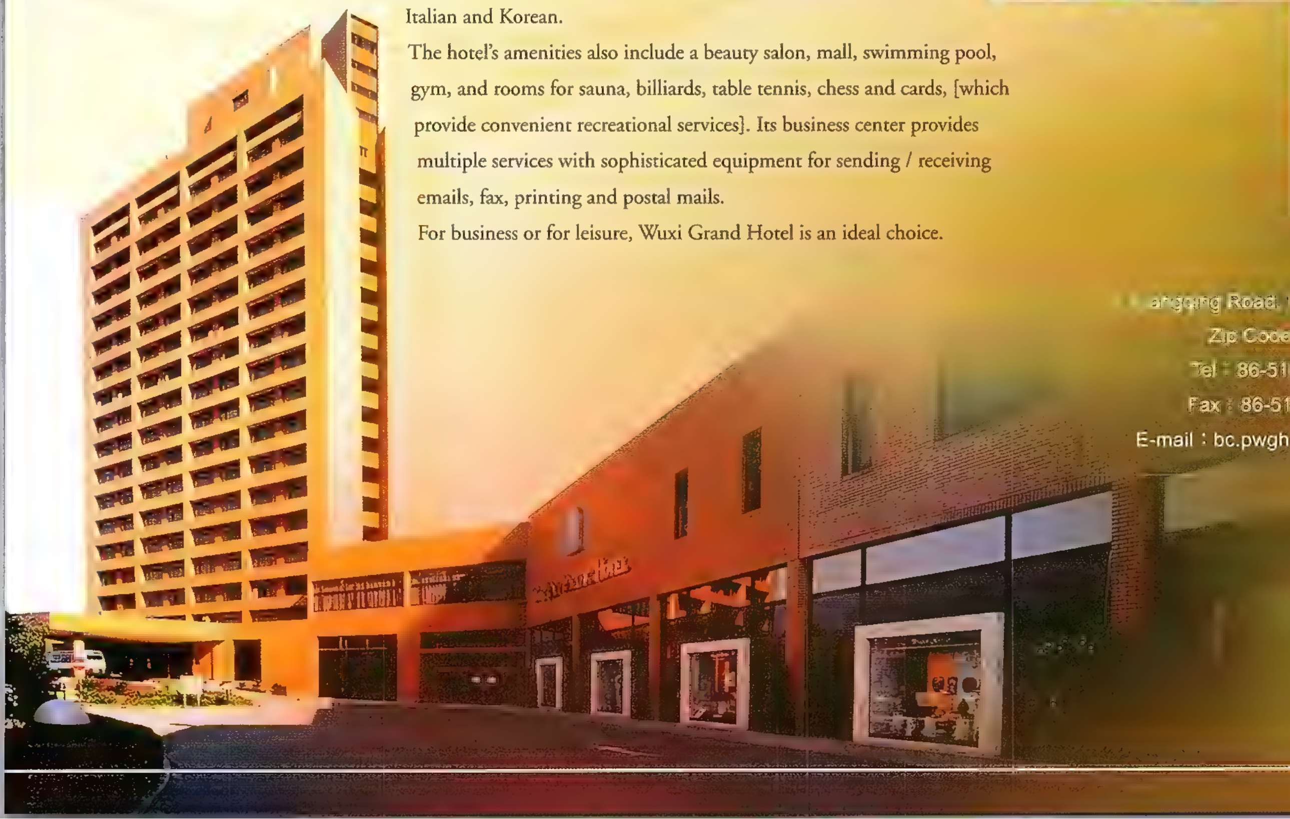
The catering service of Wuxi Grand Hotel, headed by chief chef Mr. Zhou Guoliang, provides local Wuxi dishes, as well as Sichuan and Guangdong dishes. It has been widely chosen for business dinners, for entertaining international guests, and for local people's wedding banquets. Since 1998, the hotel has participated in dozens of food festivals in Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, and has been highly commended each time by the local catering circles, gourmets and media alike. Its Western food and Japanese restaurants are managed by well-known Western and Japanese chefs, with ingredients imported from their source countries, to guarantee authentic tastes and high quality. Recently, its Oriental Cherry Hall serving Japanese food on the 20th floor has taken a new look after remodeling and offers Japanese buffet at weekend. You can have a nice view of the brilliant city light at night while enjoying the scrumptious food.



Wuxi Grand Hotel is an upscale joint venture catering to domestic and international guests. Set up in April 1989, it is one of the earliest 4-star Chinese hotels and has been honoured repeatedly as a 'Best Star-rated Hotel in China'.

Known for its meticulous services attending to customers' personal needs and also for its excellent foreign languages services, Wuxi Grand Hotel has established a public image as an upscale hotel offering first-class service and attracting a galaxy of celebrities.

There are 325 comfortable and luxurious rooms of various types in the hotel, each elegantly decorated with adequate facilities, such as central air-conditioning, separate bathroom, refrigerator and a bar. The availability of wide-band Internet resources enables guests to enjoy net surfing at a super speed. The TV equipment provides 23 satellite channels for international programs in many foreign languages, including English, Japanese, German, Italian and Korean.



The hotel's amenities also include a beauty salon, mall, swimming pool, gym, and rooms for sauna, billiards, table tennis, chess and cards, [which provide convenient recreational services]. Its business center provides multiple services with sophisticated equipment for sending / receiving emails, fax, printing and postal mails.

For business or for leisure, Wuxi Grand Hotel is an ideal choice.

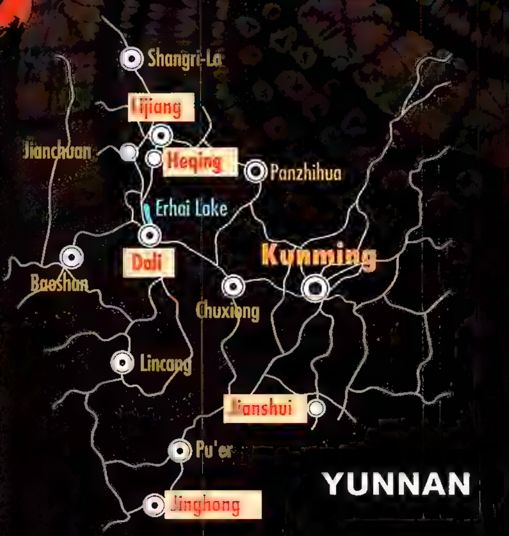
[illegible]angqing Road, Wuxi, Jiangsu, China
Zip Code : 214061
Tel : 86-510-85806789
Fax : 86-510-82700991
E-mail : bc.pwgh@public1.wx.js.cn

# in Yunnan

## A World of Learning

Photos & Article • Li Zhixiong

A seasonal vacation is a great time for a study tour and Yunnan is one of the best places to learn arts and crafts. It is home to many ethnic groups like the Bai, Naxi, Dai and Tibetans, each with their own wonderful traditional handicrafts. Take in the sights and pick up some skills at the same time. What more can you ask for?


Shangri-La
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Heqing
Panzhihua
Erhai Lake
Dali
Kunming
Baoshan
Chuxiong
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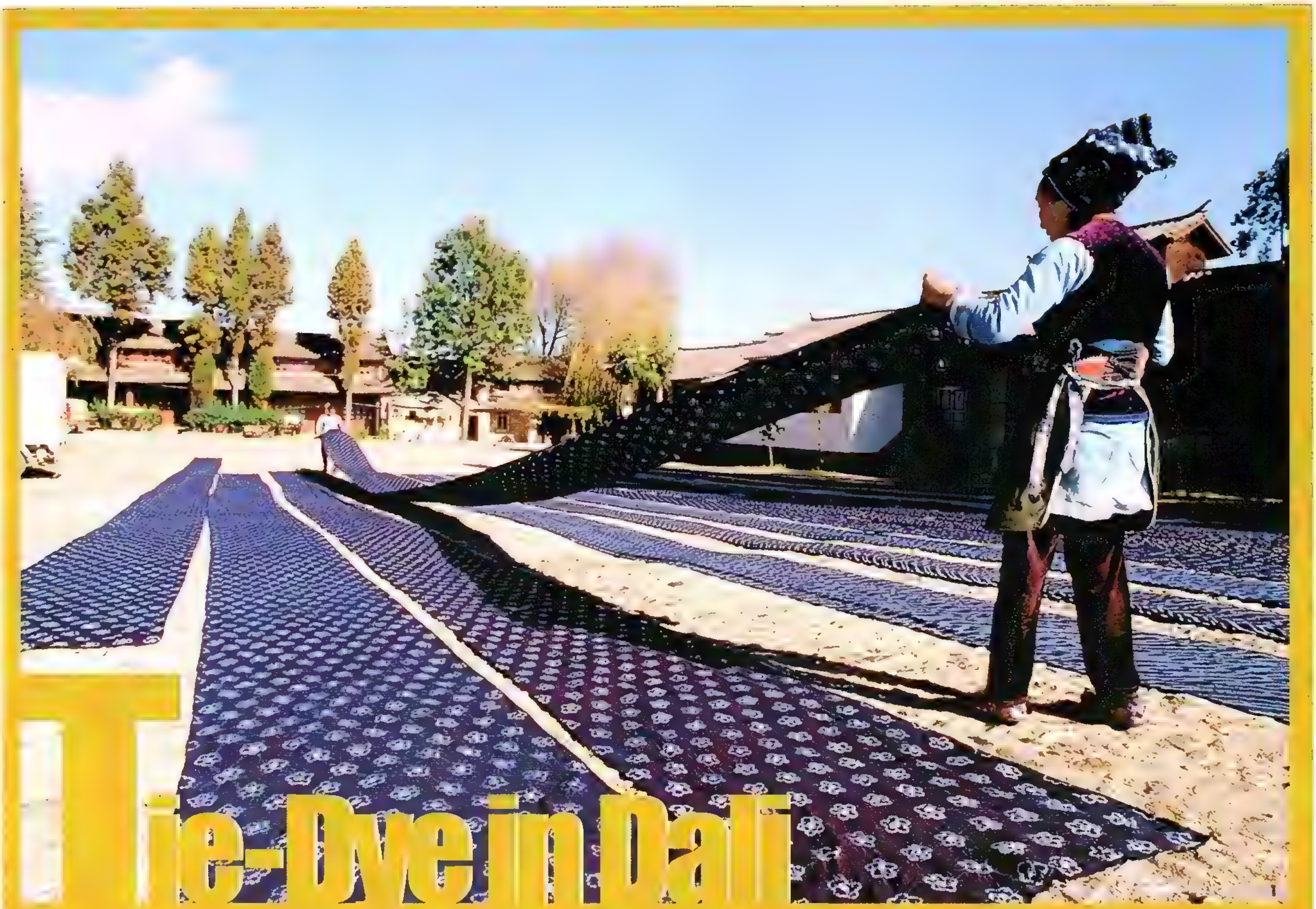
YUNNAN

# Tie-Dye in Dali



**Opening page picture: Tie-dyed fabric hangs from tall bamboo poles.**

**1.Hanging out the dyed fabric to dry.**

Ever wondered how to tie-dye? The best place to learn has to be Zhoucheng, Dali, Yunnan.

Zhoucheng is around 23 kilometres to the north of Dali, and with over 1,500 Bai households, it is the largest village in Dali. In a typical Bai village layout, there are ancient stone laneways crisscrossing within, connecting the white walled and black roof-tiled residences with their 'three rooms, one screen wall, four-sided building and courtyard' structures. I'm told that nine out of ten families in Zhoucheng Village are skilled in tie-dyeing. I found a nice lady under a tall banyan tree and after asking her where the tie-dye workshops were in the village, she took me to her home.

## Tie-Dye Yard – Similar to the Film 'Ju Dou'

Mrs. Yang lives in a large courtyard within the maze of old lanes and uses the front yard to display her finished tie-dye items. The side rooms are filled with dyed fabrics in a mind-boggling array of colours. As you enter the rear yard, there is another courtyard on the right, which is Mrs. Yang's family tie-dye workshop and drying yard. Here you'll find three big wooden tubs for dyeing, each taller than a person and about 1.5 metres in diameter. Two workers stood on tall stumps stirring the fabric in the tub with thick long sticks. Two iron pots were on the boil nearby.

Zhoucheng Village doesn't have enough land for all its population, so historically villagers have had to make a living out of textiles as well as working the land. Weaving and dyeing came to be an important part of village life.

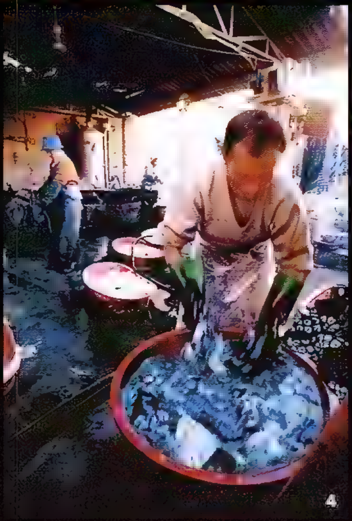
## Traditional Tie-Dyeing – 'Jiaoxie'

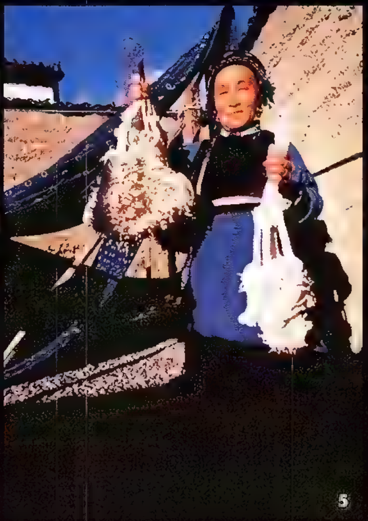
The dyeing methods employed at Zhoucheng Village include dip-dyeing, flat cloth dip-dyeing, pattern printing, double-sided dyeing and tie-dyeing. The tie-dyed fabric is the most famous. Tie-dye was historically called 'Jiaoxie', or colloquially referred to as 'knotted dyeing'. First patterns are printed onto white fabric, then the patterned parts are gathered and sewn up — as if 'knots'. After repeated dyeing treatments, rinsing and thread removal, patterns would emerge in the 'knotted' parts that haven't been dyed, resulting in charming white prints on either blue or indigo backgrounds.

Zhoucheng's tie-dye technique uses vegetable dyes and hand-tied patterns. The tools are no different from generations ago — a pinewood dye-tub, hard chestnut wood stirring stick, wood and bamboo pole drying rack, and a stone roller. The only modern equipment is a washing machine with spin-dry function that's used to dry the tie-dyed fabric.

2.Banlangen is the main ingredient for tie-dyeing.

3.Zhoucheng's tie-dyeing industry uses a vegetable dye called dried indigo. Usually the steps vary according to the depth of colour required.


4.The unknotted tie-dyed fabric is rinsed several times in a wooden tub filled with clean water. The final patterns depend on this step being carried out properly.


5.This Bai lady's handiwork is the local tie-dye 'knotted fabric'.

6.The 'knotted fabric' must be soaked in water before dyeing to ensure the dyes are fully absorbed into the cloth.

## The Tie-Dye Procedures

**Step 1: Tie-dyeing patterns** Patterns are hand-sewn onto white calico. The quality of the handiwork determines the finished product, so it's a job for those skilled with needle and thread.

**Step 2: Dip-dyeing** Zhoucheng tie-dye mostly uses a type of vegetable dye called dried indigo. The steps vary according to the depth of colour desired: dye once to twice for faded blue; 3-4 times for a darker blue; 5-6 times to get a navy shade. Because of the complicated process, dyeing a batch of fabric may require a few days. Dip-dyeing is an arduous task, involving non-stop stirring of the 'knotted fabric' in the dyeing tub. I worked up quite a sweat after stirring for only ten minutes – and had to concede defeat and stop to rest my sore muscles.

**Step 3: Removal from the vat** The first thing tie-dye families do when they wake up is to take the fabric out of the dye vat. It is placed on the stirring sticks over the vat to get rid of excess water, then spin-dried in the washing machine and hung out to dry.

**Step 4: Releasing the thread** The thread is removed from the dyed and dried 'knotted cloth'.

**Step 5: Rinsing** The unknotted fabric is rinsed several times in a wooden tub filled with clean water. The final patterns depend on this step being carried out properly. Usually the newly dyed fabric shows too sharp a contrast between the blue and white colours. The rinsing slightly fades the dye so there's gradation of colour, softening the contrast and creating some soft tones between blue and white. This step looks simple, but is the key to determining the quality of the finished product.

**Step 6:** Flattening the fabric with a stoneroller, again is a test of one's vigour and stamina.

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### Handy Info

**Transport:**

Buses go from Dali to Zhoucheng; tickets cost 5~8 yuan.

**Finding a teacher:**

just ask the local women at the village's big banyan tree.

**Accommodation:**

- Dali International Bicycle Hotel — 68, Boai Lu, Dali. Double rooms (with bathroom) 80 yuan; beds in double and triple rooms cost 20~30 yuan.
- Dali International Youth Hostel —181, Boai Lu (the corner of Yu'er Lu) Dali. Double rooms with bathrooms cost 50 yuan; beds in double rooms and triple rooms cost 15 yuan.
- Dali Siji (Four Seasons) Inn — 55, Boai Lu, Dali. Standard rooms cost 150 yuan, normal rooms 50 yuan, dorms 15 yuan.
- Sanyou Inn — 1, Wenxian Lu, Dali (at the south entrance to the old town). Standard rooms 60 yuan, normal rooms 20 yuan.

Yu'an Yuan — the western end of Huguo Lu, with a large courtyard, double rooms cost 50 yuan.

# Heqing Silverware in Dali

There's a place in Dali's Heqing county — which they say has hammered out a glorious business — called Xinhua village.

Xinhua village was known for its handicrafts from as early as the Nanzhou state (653 — 902). Its copper and silver wares spread along the Tea Route as far as Yunnan's Diqing plateau, Kangding and Aba in Sichuan province, Tibet, and even across the border into Nepal and India. The village's exports have been famous and beloved for over a thousand years.

## A Millennium of Hammer Knocks

The first time I went to Xinhua village was six years ago. On my second visit to Xinhua village, I made straight for this same family and found the owner Cun Yinqing at home, but without his apprentices. Also Cun's business seemed quieter. It turns out his apprentices had mastered the art, then started their own workshops and took on their own apprentices. Cun Yinqing didn't mind the leisurely pace though as it means he can work on creating his own designs, rather than turning out many knives from the same mould. There are three types: sterling silver, white copper and brass. Every his Tibetan knives are special, with exquisite carvings of dragons and phoenixes on the sheath, and sharkskin trim. The blade holder is also studded with coral and turquoise — each and every one a unique example of Tibetan knife art.

Cun Yinqing may be making less Tibetan knives and his income has dropped since his apprentices left, but his fame has spreaded. With orders coming in from many Tibetan areas, I had to give up the idea of having Cun Yinqing as my teacher.

## 'Scrouging' a Living and Learning a Craft

Cun Guangwei, a neighbour of Cun Fabiao, is the sixth generation of Xinhua village's best-known silversmith families. Cun Guangwei is 29 years old, the youngest of four brothers. As he remembers, his grandfather was also a silversmith, carrying a small burner and making silver cups and bowls, Tibetan knives and jewellery for rich folks on his travels around Sichuan's Liangshan Yi region, Yunnan's Diqing, and Tibet. Now his three elder brothers are all making silverware in Lhasa. Cun Guangwei tagged along with his elder brother to Lhasa in his teens, then came back to promote the craft he had learned. Now, Cun usually takes orders from Lhasa for all sizes of yak-butter lamps, making two to three thousand a year.

Cun Guangwei was willing to teach me, but given only one day, which was a crash course in the theory and application. I had to pick up as much as I Could.

1.Walk in any home in Xinhua village and you'll see piles of semi-finished silverware.

2. Cun Fabiao is known as the most skillful of Xinhua village's silversmiths. His silver nine dragon tea sets are being sold for up to 10,000 yuan each.

3.Care must be taken when carving, with variations in the depth and the strength of the hammering, to keep the pattern symmetry.

4.Cun Guangwei mainly creates made-to-order yak-butter lamps for customers in Lhasa, shipping two to three thousand pieces annually to Lhasa.

5.The yak-butter lamp is cleaned with diluted sulfuric acid, then polished with silk before it's ready for shipping.

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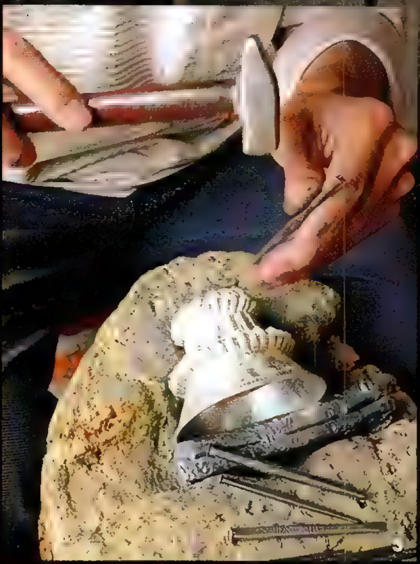

## Making a Yak-butter Lamp

**Step 1: Cutting** Draw a circle on the copper or silver. To make a copper yak-butter lamp the same size as a silver one, a larger initial piece is needed due to shrinkage. This is a painstaking job that can be quite tedious.

**Step 2: Shaping** Knock out a rough lamp shape by hammering the material on a concave steel mould – remember to knock as you temper so the thickness is even. When I tried it, I found that it's important to control the heat in tempering to get it right.

**Step 3: Carving** This is the key step in making yak-butter lamps. First inject melted lead in the shaped concave work in progress – to provide support – then use a chisel to carve patterns. Carving is what I really wanted to learn, but since I was unable to perform all the steps in one day to make my lamp, I used one that had been spoilt in step two to practice on. Carving requires expert co-ordination of both hands; the left hand controls the direction and curvature of the patterns while the right hand controls the strength and rhythm. Care must be taken when carving, with variations in the depth and the strength of the hammering, to keep the pattern symmetry.

**Step 4: Putting it together** This step involves welding the three parts of the yak-butter lamp together, a task the master usually does.

**Step 5: Cleaning & polishing** The yak-butter lamp is cleaned with diluted sulfuric acid, then polished with silk.

## Handy Info

**Transport:**

Xinhua village is conveniently located about 140 kilometres from Dali, 40 kilometres from Lijiang, and 12 kilometres from the Lijiang airport. There are many buses that pass by Xinhua village — just get off at a huge sign that says 'small hammer knocks for a thousand years' — then take a one-yuan ride on a local minibus.

**Finding a teacher:**

- Cun Yinqing's home: 292, Xinhua Village, professional Tibetan knife maker.
- Cun Guangwei's home: 179, Xinhua Village, professional craftsman of Tibetan yak-butter lamps.
- Cun Fabiao's home: Cun Fabiao is the most skillful of Xinhua village's silversmiths. He lives two doors down from Cun Guangwei and makes every kind of wares.

**Food & Accommodation:**

You usually eat and stay with the family that teaches you, as long as you're willing to work hard and learn. But it's not all work and no play — try the snacks at the village stalls — local delicacies include deep-fried dragonflies, crispy locusts, and crispy fish.

**Shopping:**

Take a look at the Xinhua Shizhaizi Yunnan silverware museum next to the village square. Here you can also buy silverware, jade items, Dali stoneware, Tibetan tea, Tibetan medicine, and Pu'er tea. But if you're shopping at the village stalls — you must know how to bargain and to distinguish the real thing from the fakes.

5

# Dongba Paper in Lijiang

My teacher Yixia is a Naxi lad who studied under the 12th generation paper-making master Li Xueguang. Li's Dongba paper is widely known and highly regarded in Lijiang — ideal for Dongba calligraphy and art.

## A Marriage of Chinese Papermaking Techniques

Papermaking in ancient China was split into two major techniques — the pouring and dipping methods. Pouring pulp onto a screen attached to a fixed frame then drying naturally in the sun is the main feature of the pouring method. Popular in the Indian sub-continent as well as southeast Asia, Xishuangbanna's Dai people and the Tibetans mainly use this method. The inland regions instead use a mould consisting of a screen that can be removed from the deckle frame allowing for separate drying — the screen is dipped into pulp-filled water, then lifted to leave pulp on the screen.

Judging by the tools and processes in the making of Dongba paper, the Naxi paper-making technique has features of both ancient Chinese methods. Paper made from all these traditional methods is thick and strong, and is mostly used for writing Buddhist scriptures.

The main ingredient that the Naxi people use in making Dongba paper is the bark of a shrub that grows next to the Jinsha River at altitudes around 2000 metres. It is slightly toxic and known as 'wandai' in the Naxi language.

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1.Since Dongba paper has tiny amounts of insect repellent, it's said to be mothproof for years.

2.Under He Dongba's instructions, I copied some Dongba characters onto my self-made Dongba paper to take home.

3.Beating the crushed linter into pulp is hard work.

The screen deckle and then the screen are placed into a wooden trough filled with water. Pulp is then poured in and spread out evenly by hand before the screen deckle is slowly taken out.

5.After the paper has dried, it is separated from the wooden board by holding the paper with one hand and tapping lightly with the other. Then a calendar is used to scrape the paper and - voilh - Dongba paper is ready!

6.He Dongba's calligraphy and art on Dongba paper cost 200 yuan for smaller pieces and 300 yuan for larger works.

## Preparing the Dongba Paper Raw Material

Step 1: Cut some 'wanda' and peel off its bark to dry.

Step 2: Soak the dried bark in water 15–20 days, scrape off the outermost dark layer of the soaked bark, and dry again.

Step 3: Soak for another 3–5 days and cut into smaller pieces of 10 cm. Peel the thicker bark into several pieces, so the materials are of even in size and thickness.

Step 4: After drying, boil with some potash for 5–6 hours.

Step 5: Hand-wash the boiled material in clean water.

Step 6: Use a large wood pestle to crush the material in a big tree stump to separate the fibres, then soak again.

These six steps are both time and energy-consuming, so I decided to learn the technique of turning pulp to paper. Fortunately, He Dongba agreed to write some lucky Dongba characters on my paper so I could show it at home.

## Another Five Steps in Making Dongba Paper

Step 1: First the master told me to put the crushed material in the bucket to beat it into pulp. This is hard work that often gets pulp on one's face.

Step 2: Next, I put the screen deckle into a wooden trough filled with clean water, placed the screen on the deckle, poured in the pulp, spread it out in the water, and then slowly took out the screen deckle.

Step 3: Gently removing the screen from the deckle, I put the wet paper onto wooden boards and dried them under the sun.

Step 4: When semi-dry, the master told me to press the paper with a hemp-wrapped calendar to flatten it.

Step 5: Once the paper dries (in about 2–3 hours), I held the paper with one hand, lightly tapped the wooden board with the other to separate them, then used the calendar to give the paper a sheen. That's it, a piece of Dongba paper is finished!

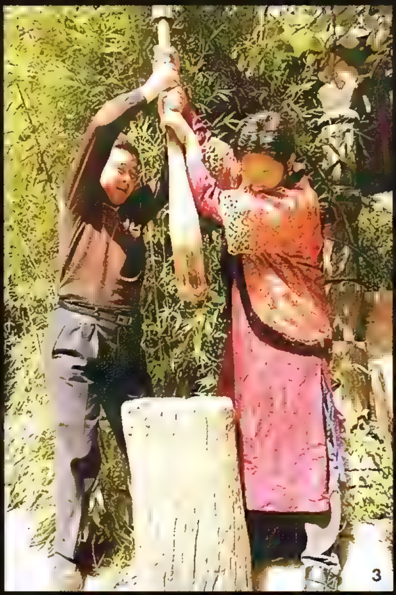
Since the Dongba paper is slightly toxic, it's said to be mothproof for hundreds of years!

### Handy Info

**Transport:** Location is about 28 kilometres from Lijiang airport and 40 kilometres from Xinhua village.

**Food & accommodation:** You'll be spoilt for choice in Lijiang. Sleeping at local residences will cost 30 yuan per night while hotel rooms costing 100 yuan are quite decent.

**Finding a teacher:** Dongba Culture Exhibition Centre is in Heilongtan Park; entrance fee is 40 yuan. Learning papermaking is free, but Dongba calligraphy and paintings will set you back around 200 yuan for small pieces and 300 yuan for the larger ones.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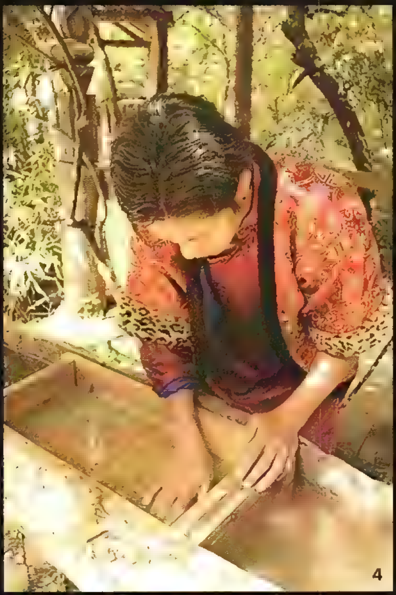
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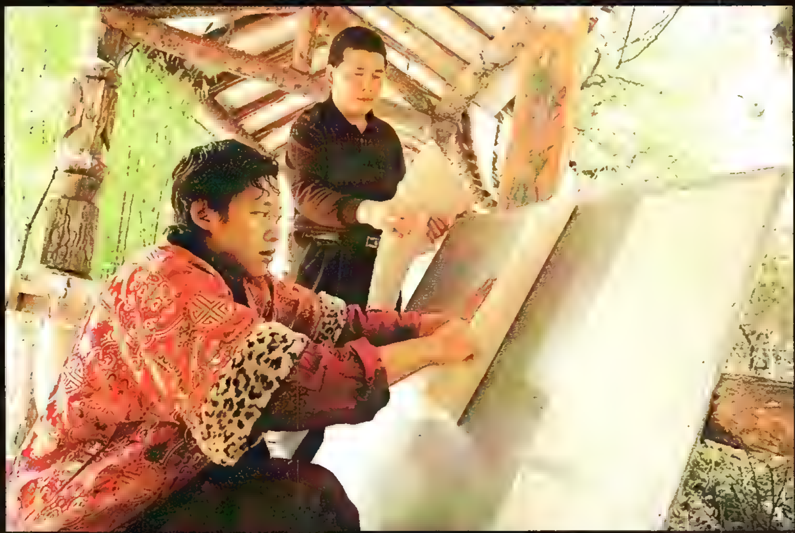

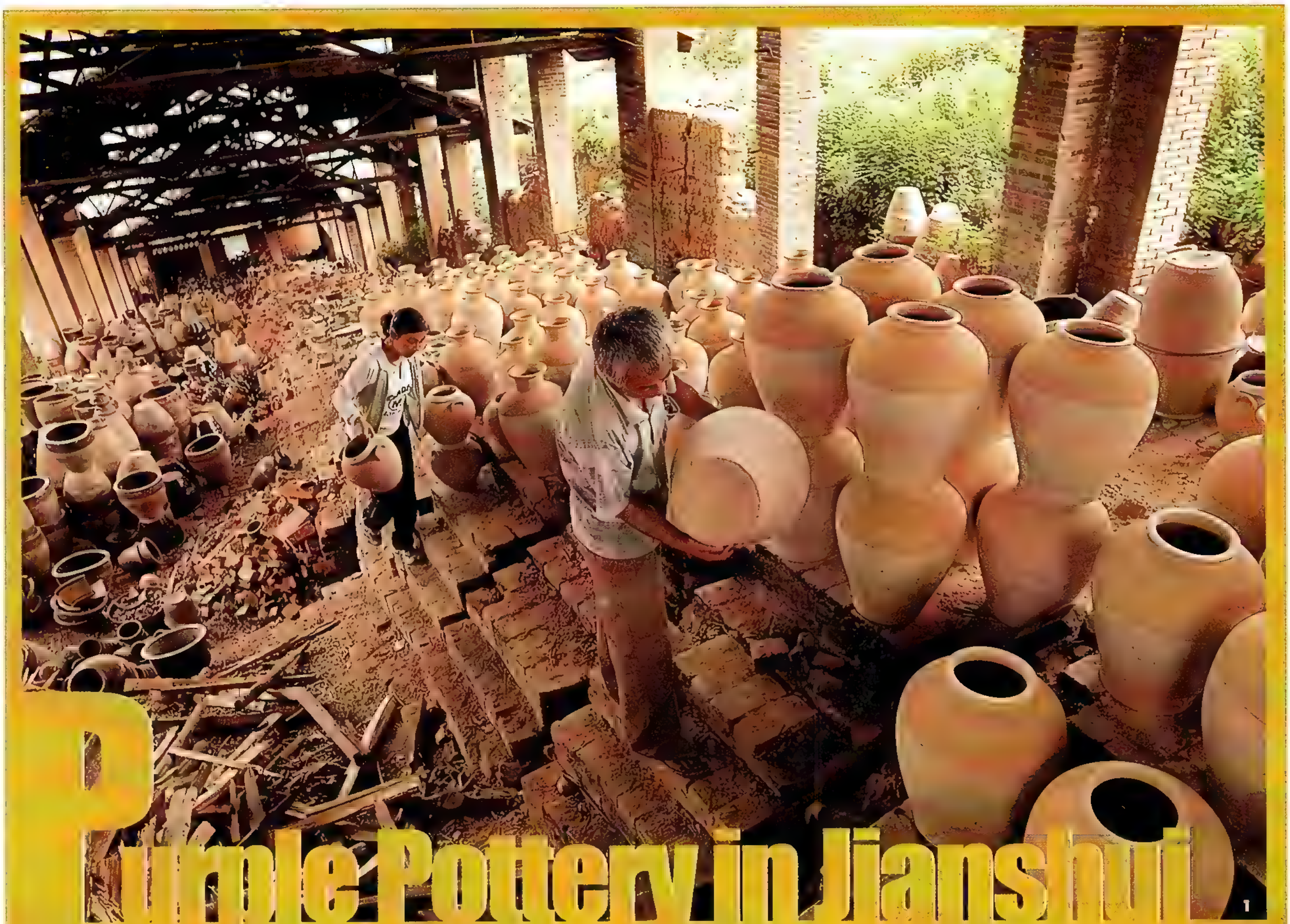
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# Purple Pottery in Jianshui

Of China's four famous types of pottery, one is from Jianshui of Yunnan.

## Studying with a Celebrity for a Day

Jianshui's history of making purple pottery started in the Daoguang period of the Qing dynasty (1821—1850) with the making of clay pipes. In the Guangxu period (1875 — 1908), potter Pan Jinhuai discovered that the use of five-coloured clay resulted in a glossy purple product. As it quickly became popular, it also became Jianshui's unique purple pottery. Wanyao Village kilns are mostly dragon — kilns built around the mountain. Every clan uses a kiln — the elder in the clan manages the collective firing and the families sell finished products separately.

Mr. Chen Shaokang lives in Wanyao Village — a village where everyone has lived on making pottery for generations. The village lanes and walls are strewn with broken bits of pottery. Chen was born into a potter's family and wanted to follow in the family trade, but his father wanted him to be a teacher. Still, Chen's wishes won out in the end — he became an apprentice at the Jianshui pottery factory when he was sixteen, starting a lifelong career in the art of pottery.

His career went far — first, he progressed from making crude pottery to fine pottery, then he studied teapot making with master Gu Jingzhou, as well as various other pottery masters. The variety and number of teachers meant he was able to absorb many styles that have made Jianshui purple pottery into what it is today. He was awarded the title of 'folk craft artist' by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and China's Folk Artist Association in 1995.

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## Nine Steps to Making Pottery

**Step 1: Stirring and filtering the slurry** Put the clay in a big bucket and add water, stirring to separate the sand and clay. Then take out some slurry and place into another bucket for filtering. This is a tiring step that requires one to look like a miner – you'll definitely be getting dirty.

**Step 2: Clay kneading** This step squeezes air trapped in the clay, through plenty of kneading, to ensure the clay is smooth and malleable. It's quite energy-consuming.

**Step 3: Shaping** This is the most important step in the entire pottery-making process. Be calm, clear-sighted, and steady to shape the clay evenly on the spinning wheel into something you want – at the thickness and size you want. This step really tests one's skills. I practiced for over an hour and summoned my utmost patience. At first I couldn't get the thickness even enough, resulting in a top-heavy wobbling piece. Finally I was able to make something that slightly resembled a jar. The master told me to flatten one side so it stuck out, saying it was quite creative and could be made into an ashtray.

**Step 4: Writing and painting** This step requires tremendous expertise in calligraphy and painting, not something acquired in one or two days.

**Step 5: Carving of characters and patterns** This is time to carve out the drawn patterns on the pottery. It's important to be careful about the depth of the knife carving, to maintain a flowing rhythm and finish it in one go, without carving through the clay. The hardest is to carve on green ware, because if it's not done properly, this pottery's prices could fall through the floor. Again, it is not something that can be mastered in two weeks, so it's just as well that my ashtray just needs to look like one.

**Step 6: Filling-in** This means using a spatula to fill in the carved areas with light-coloured clay.

**Step 7: Perfecting the green ware** A round iron band is used while the wheel is spinning to scrape out indents on the pottery that first must be filled with more clay before the finishing touches can be put onto the green ware. This is another delicate task that could determine the quality and price of the finished product.

**Step 8: Kiln change** 'Kiln change' is a new word that I learnt as an apprentice, referring to the unpredictable changes the pottery goes through in the course of being kiln-fired. Mr. Chen says it's a chemical reaction when oxidation meets a reducing atmosphere. Pottery reacts to the reducing atmosphere (factors include temperature and oxygen content) in the kiln differently, with some sections taking on unpredictable dreamy colours. This is what separates Jianshui's purple pottery from the other three types of famous Chinese pottery. Being an outsider, naturally I was not allowed in the kiln area, so I could only hope that the next time I went to Jianshui I would see my ashtray take on some magical effects.

**Step 9: Polishing** Another job to work up a sweat – using the sanding wheel to polish the fired piece of pottery several times so the final purple pottery product – which is unlaquered – turns out shiny as a mirror.

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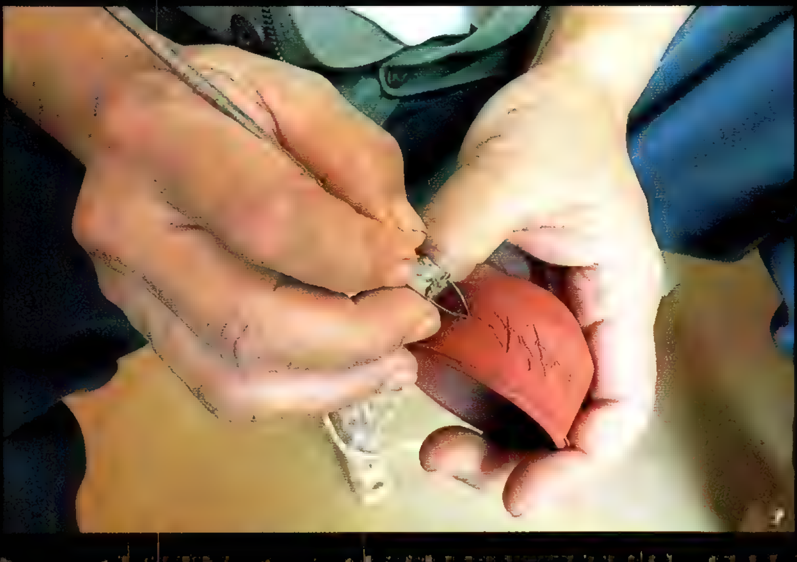
### Handy Info

**Transport:** Kunming's eastern bus terminal has buses going to Jianshui everyday; tickets cost 25 yuan. Wanyao Village is just 2 kilometres from Jianshui county's north entrance, which is served by minibuses; tickets cost 2 yuan.

**Finding a teacher:** Chen Shaokang Purple Pottery Workshop (Address: 365, Wanyao Village, Jianshui County, Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan, telephone: (0873) 6718959. There are many similar workshops in Jianshui, especially around Wanyao Village.



1.The large dragon kiln can fire hundreds of pots at the same time.

2.Mr. Chen's 'kiln-change' purple pottery pieces are adored by collectors.

3.Throwing is the most important step in the entire pottery — making process. Be calm, clear-sighted and steady.

4.Put the clay in a big bucket and add water, stirring to separate the sand and clay. Then take out some slurry and place into another bucket for filtering.

5.Use the sanding wheel to polish the fired piece of pottery several times, so the final purple pottery product — despite being unlaquered — turns out shiny as a mirror.

6.Use a round iron band on a spinning wheel to scrape out indents on the pottery that first must be filled with more clay before the finishing touches can be put onto the green ware.

7.Carve out the drawn patterns on the pottery, maintaining a flowing rhythm to finish it in one go.

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# Beiye Scriptures in Xishuangbana

Four years ago, I first saw what seemed like books carved on leaves at a friend's home Xishuangbana. The book was yellowed, gilded, written with squiggly characters — supposedly ancient Dai language scriptures called Beiye Scriptures. On my return to Xishuangbana, I saw an old man carefully carving letters onto leaves in front of Manchunman Buddhist temple in Ganlanba's Dai Park — it piqued my interest in learning the art.

## A Gem of Dai Culture

The man writing the scriptures is called Kanglangdun, a 78 year old local from Dai Park's Manchunman Village. He became a monk when he was 12 and was promoted to a Buddha master at Manchunman temple. Due to his years spent as a monk and his learning of the scriptures, Kanglangdun had mastered the skills of writing Beiye Scriptures. Academics referred to him as the Beiye man.

Beiye Scriptures are the most precious cultural heritage for the Dai people. There are two types: Beiye carved and paper-copied. The Beiye carved types are more common and are most special. Beiye Scriptures in the Dai language are called 'talan'.

Dai language Beiye Scriptures are roughly split into two types: religious classics, including Buddhist scriptures and other religious materials, and social documents on a huge range of subjects. Not only are there large numbers of Buddhist classics but also China's only Theravada Buddhism scriptures, which are of immense value in China's Buddhist history. The religious materials include worship ritual sayings, horoscope readings, curses, etc., which were popularly spoken in the local community and later recorded when the Dai language emerged. As for the social documents, they are faithful records of the Dai society's politics, history, legislation, and even masterful literary works hence their incredible cultural value.

Research shows that crime rates in southeast Asia are very low, and some assume this is related to the locals' belief in Buddhism as well as these Beiye Scriptures that are passed down from generation to generation, teaching people to be kind and tolerant. Qingsheng's prison has never been used since it was built. Locals are very proud of their prison and the fact it's more a tourist destination than anything else.

To make a set of Beiye Scriptures takes around 10 days from start to finish, though thankfully some of the steps can be carried out simultaneously.

*Translated by Cheng Lei*

1.Being Buddhist, the Dai people believe in reincarnation.

2.Leaves are trimmed and three to five bundled together, then boiled in rice-rinsing water for over 20 hours.

3.Beiye Scriptures are carved on leaves from the Beiye palm.

4.To ensure the carving is neat and attractive, Kanglangdun first marks a faint margin on the leaf with the thread bow.

5.Kanglangdun carving Dai language characters along the margins on the leaf with an iron pen.

6.Aged Beiye leaves are cut in the winter.

7.The old man carving scriptures is 78 year old Kanglangdun.

## The Making of Beiye Scriptures

Step 1: Cut aged Beiye leaves in winter  Trim the edges and boil in bundles of three to five leaves in with rice-rinsing water for over 20 hours.

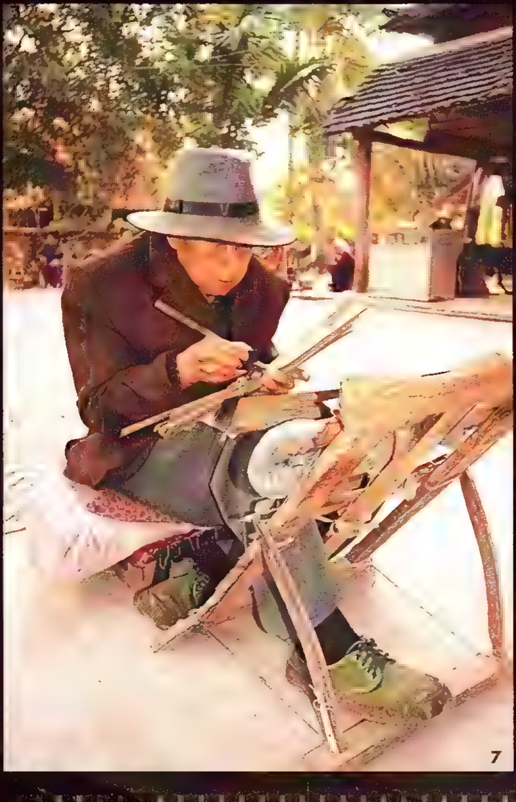
Step 2: Take out and wipe clean with sand Dry naturally, then flatten in bunches with special wooden frames. Trim the leaves to 50 cm long and 12 cm wide with a sharp knife so that they can be written on.

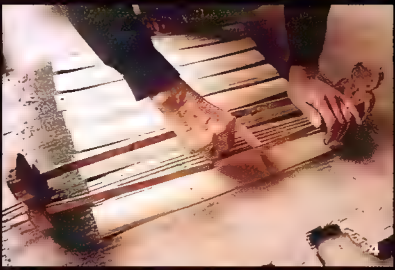
Step 3: Writing or carving of Beiye Scriptures Use an iron pen a sharp needle is fastened onto the top end of a comfortable-to-hold wooden stick.

Step 4: Ensuring the writing is neat and attractive Kanglangdun first marks the leaf with thin margins, then use the iron pen to write the ancient Dai words along the margins.

Step 5: Finishing touches  Brush with a black ink made from vegetable oil mixed with potash, then wipe clean. The carved letters will show up clearly on the Beiye and would not fade with time. Bind them into books and you have the beautiful and long-lasting Beiye Scriptures.

To be honest, making Beiye Scriptures is not hard. I could easily get the hang of most steps: flattening, trimming of edges, margin-making. But when it came to writing Dai I was stumped those squiggly words were hard to copy, not to mention spacely them evenly. I finally managed to write one and took it to the young monks at the Manchunman temple – behind the master's back – but they couldn't make heads or tails of my writing.





### Handy Info

**Transport:**

By air — Xishuangbana is serviced by flights from major Chinese cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing and Kunming, as well as from Bangkok, Thailand. There are 6-20 flights to Kunming per day, with a flight time of about 50 minutes.

By ship — Jinghong Port has shipping links with Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia; routes from Jinghong to Laos and Thailand are already operating.

By land — Buses from Kunming to Jinghong; tickets are 152 yuan. Jinghong buses to Menglihan (Ganlanba); tickets cost 6.5 yuan.

**Food & accommodation:** Meals and a stay at one of the Dai Park's Dai families will set you back around 30 yuan per day; conditions are good.

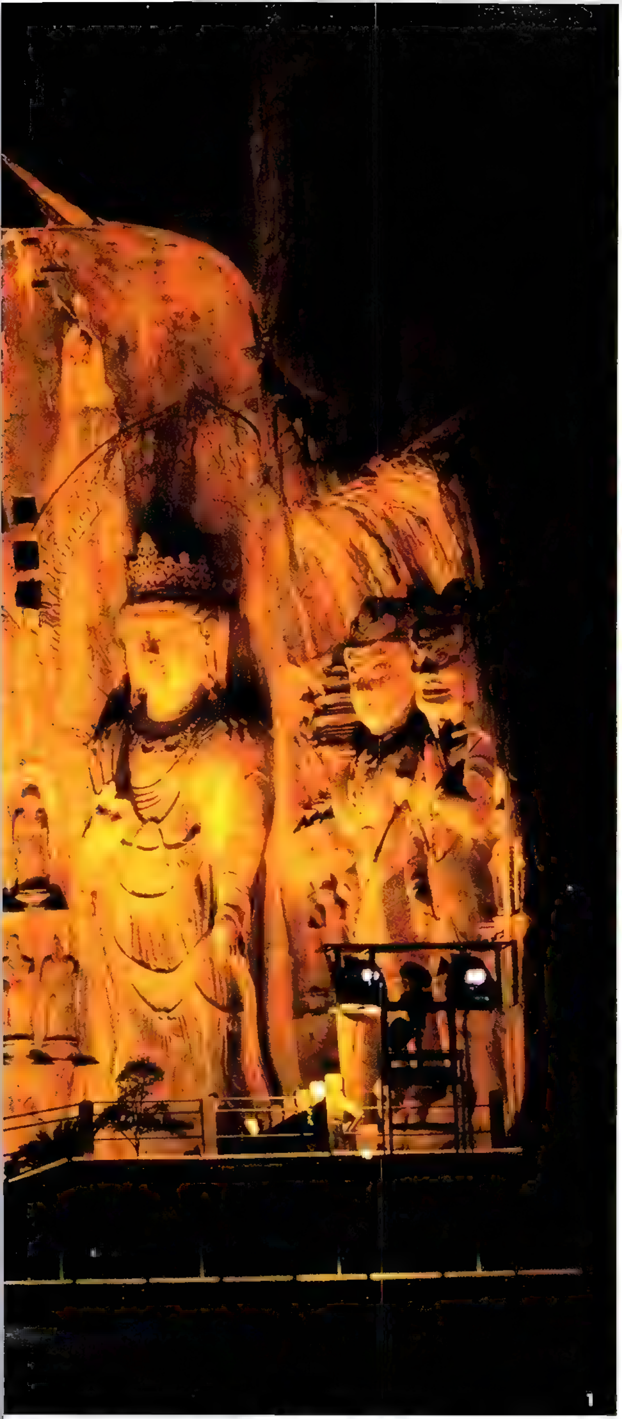
# A Fresh Tour through the Ancient Capitals of Henan

Photos & Article · Ma Yiu Chun

Among the four ancient capitals in Henan, Luoyang has the most brilliant history: 11 dynasties regarded this place as their capitals in sequence; Confucius came here to boost his academic career; and the White Horse Temple, which is the first Buddhist temple in China, and the Longmen Grottoes, one of the largest grotto complexes in China, are located right here. Luoyang was also the hometown of brothers Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao, who were the founders of the School of Principles during the Song Dynasty (960 —1279). It was also here that Laozi wrote his Book of Dao and Its Virtues, Xu Shen his Notes on the Origin of Chinese Characters, Ban Gu his History of the West Han Dynasty, Wang Chong his Comments and Estimates, and Chen Shou his History of the Three Kingdoms.

This ancient city also is home to the country's most stunning peonies, the floral symbol of wealth.

With such a good reputation, the tourist industry in Luoyang should be thriving. But compared with Xi'an 400 km away, another ancient capital where the terracotta warriors and horses of the Qin Dynasty (221—206 B.C.) are located, this place is not as well known.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1. A night sightseeing tour around the Longmen Grottoes is a new experience for visitors to Luoyang.

2. Nearly a hundred children were invited to play traditional Chinese zithers, adding more fun to the Longmen evening banquet.

## A Night Tour of the Longmen Grottoes

The Longmen Grottoes is the most attractive scenic site in Luoyang. The Xiaowen Emperor of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 – 534) believed in Buddhism, therefore he had some grottoes carved to relate Buddhist scripture and images of the Buddha along the banks of the Yishui River south of Luoyang City after he moved his capital from Datong, the present Shanxi Province to here. Over several hundred years through the Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, Sui, Tang and Northern Song Dynasties, the Longmen Grottoes became one of China's greatest cultural heritage sites.

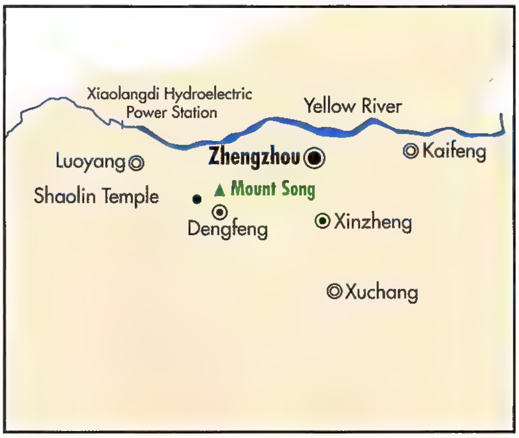
To provide more fun for tourists, a night tour was added in the Longmen Grottoes from April this year, that is, illuminated grottoes for some special visual effects.

### Longmen Grottoes

Admission: 80 yuan respectively for day and night periods
Opening Time: 08:00 — 18:30 for daytime and
19:30 — 21:30 for evening
Transport: Buses No. 53, 60, 80 and 81.

## Massage in the Context of Legends

There are many interesting aspects of this tour. In Wangcheng Park, there is a huge rock on which is carved the patterns of Design from the Yellow River and Book from the Luo River. According to legend, a dragon-like horse appeared out of the Yellow River in the time of Fuxi (a deity-like ancestor of the Chinese people), and a holy tortoise appeared in the Luo River in the reign of the Yellow Emperor. Both had spotted patterns on their backs, thus are respectively referred to as the Design from the Yellow River and the Book from the Luo River. It is said that they originated in the philosophy of the Book of Changes in China.



1. On a huge rock is the insciption of 'Design from the Yellow River and Book from the Luo River', and around the rock are the four stone animals of dragon, phoenix, bear and sheep, which are the totems of the ancient Chinese people.
2. A pilgrimage ceremony is held in the Guanlin Temple.
3. The offerings to Yu Guan are too many to see.
4. A scene depicting Empress Wu Zetian's appreciation of peonies is classically represented.
5. The Six-horse Carriage for Son of Heaven, a favourite of the king of the Zhou Dynasty is exhibited at the original place where it was unearthed.
6. Ven. Yinle, the abbot at the White Horses Temple.
7. The royal dance, A Flowery River Scene in the Moonlight during Spring Time, in which the Peony Fairy's postures are charming and attractive.

### Wangcheng Park

Admission: 35 yuan

Opening Time: 05:30 — 21:00

Transport: At the Zhongzhou Road at the centre of the city, with many buses passing, and minimum taxi fare is 5 yuan.

## Enjoying Peonies

The main reason I came to Luoyang was to appreciate the peonies.

In the last ten days of April, I came to Luoyang for the annual Peony Festival. Along the central part of Zhongzhou Road, which was the major trunk road in the downtown area, was planted everywhere with peonies, but unfortunately, I had missed them blossoming, and the flowers had all withered. In the Wangcheng Park, the most convenient site nearby to enjoy flowers, there were some flowers, but most were withering. I left the park in disappointment. In a taxi back to the hotel, the driver asked if I'd come to enjoy the flowers as he noticed I was a stranger and I had hailed the taxi at Wangcheng Park. He told me, 'Go to the International Peonies Garden if you want to see the flowers! The peonies are blossoming there.' Floriculture had improved over the years and growers could postpone theflowering of the peonies from the first ten days of April to the first ten days of May. 'Peonies look most beautiful in the early morning, just like someone who has rested well for a whole night. So just go there early tomorrow morning.' The taxi fare was 6 yuan; I paid him 8 yuan when I got off, for I appreciated the pleasant talk with him. 'You needn't pay me so much. Let me take 7. Do remember to go early tomorrow.' This driver offered perfect service even without Andy Lau's appeals.

As expected, I saw peonies blooming when I went to the International Peonies Garden the next day. Luckily I came upon a special occasion: led by some eunuchs, a bevy of pretty actresses impersonated Empress Wu Zetian, some princesses and their maids of the Tang Dynasty, strolling around to enjoy the peonies.

### International Peonies Garden

Admission: 25 yuan

Transport: Near Luoyang Airport, accessible by buses No. 27, 51 and 83.

## Grand Pilgrimage at Guanlin Temple

Guan Yu, a legendary hero who lived during the Three Kingdoms period (220 — 280), was a symbol of loyalty, righteousness, benevolence and bravery, therefore has been highly revered by later

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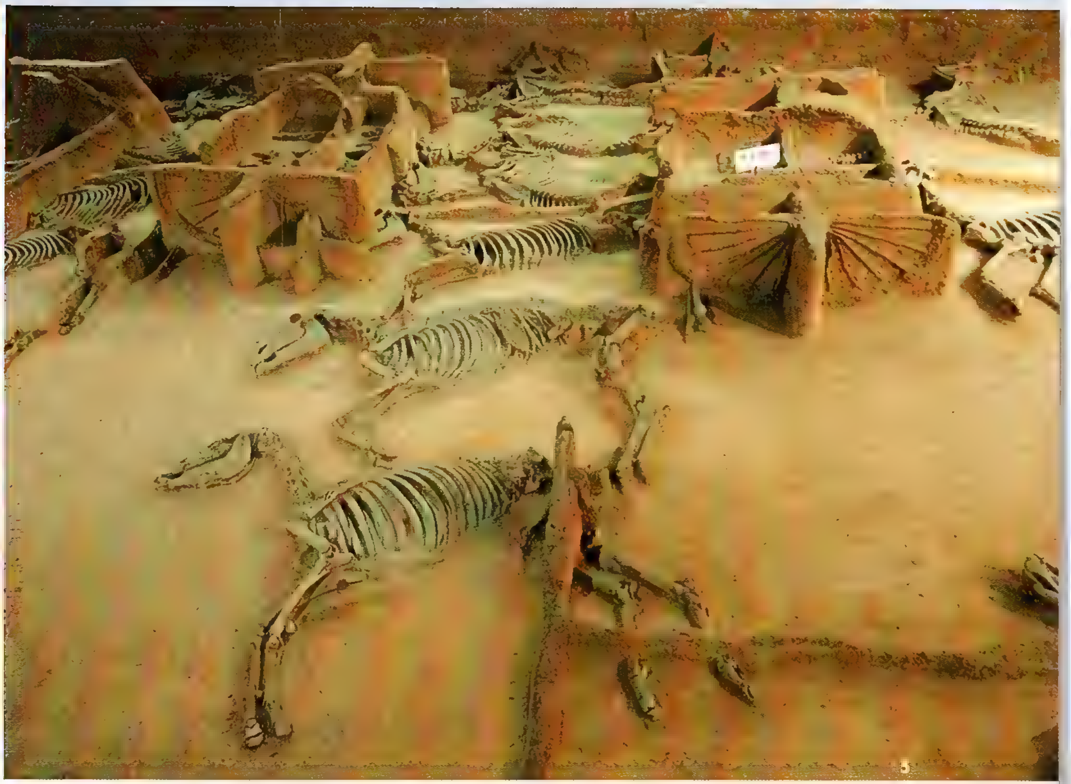

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generations. After Guan Yu was captured and decapitated in Dangyang by the troops of the Wu Kingdom, Cao Cao had Guan Yu's head interred south of Luoyang. That is how the present Guanlin Woods came into being.

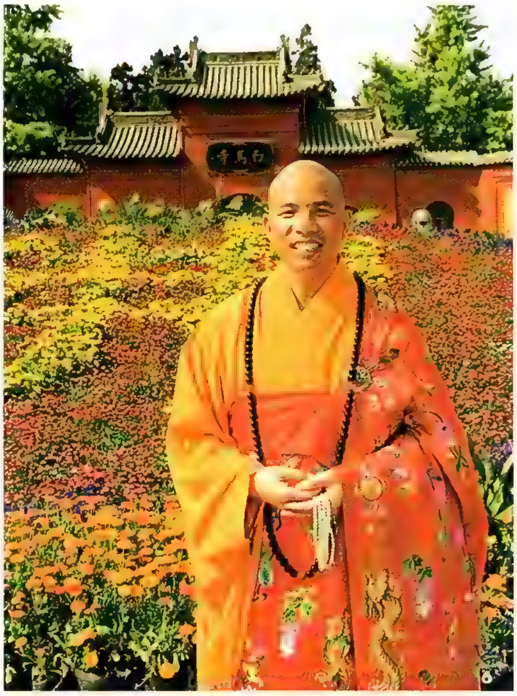
In memory of this 'Second Brother Guan', who has been the incarnation of justice, a grand ceremony is held in Guanlin Temple every year, so that people both at home and abroad can come for a pilgrimage and pray for the prosperity of the nation and the peace of its civilians.

**Guanlin Temple**

Admission: 30 yuan

Opening Time: 08:00 — 18:00

Transport: Buses No. 53, 55, 58, 60, 69 and 80.



## Six-horse Carriage for Son of Heaven

From 2002 to 2003 when a cultural square was built at the centre of Luoyang City, nearly 400 tombs and 18 pits of horse-pulled carriages of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770 — 236 B.C.) were discovered, including this so-called Six-horse Carriage for Son of Heaven, which was at the highest level at that time, and the only extant Six Horses for Son of Heaven pit still at its original site. As for the other tombs and carriage pits, they were refilled immediately after the discovery, so Luoyang is a place full of underground treasures.

**Six-horse Carriage for Son of Heaven Museum**

Admission: 30 yuan

Opening Time: 08:00 — 22:00

Transport: At Zhongzhou Road in the downtown area, with many routes of buses accessible.

## White Horse Temple

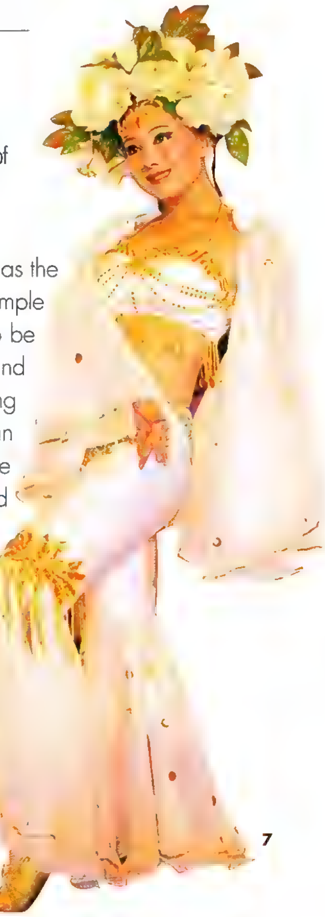
In China, there are as many Buddhist temples as the stars in the sky, among which the White Horse Temple is the most prominent, for this temple is the first to be built after Buddhism was introduced into China, and thus is extraordinarily significant. It is said that during the reign of the Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 — 220), some envoys were dispatched to the West Region for Buddhism, and they met two Buddhist monks from India. Upon invitation, these two Indians brought some sutras and Buddhist images with white horses and arrived at Luoyang, the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty. After that, Emperor Ming had the White Horse Temple built to monumentalize this event.

**White Horses Temple**

Admission: 35 yuan

Opening Time: 07:00 — 19:00

Transport: Buses No. 56 and 58.



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## Performance of Shaolin Kungfu

Mt. Songshan Shaolin Temple is far more than a temple of a thousand years of history. Since the Shaolin Temple starring Jet Lee was filmed over 20 years ago, Shaolin Temple has become a profitable international brand, and Shaolin kungfu has turned out to be a 'major product' of this temple, attracting thousands and thousands of people to visit and learn kungfu.

The Shaolin Temple has been enlarged as a scenic site, and some streets, decorative stone entrances and numerous kungfu schools have been established besides the historical relics such as the Shaolin Temple, the Forest of Pagodas, the Central Mount Temple, the Songyang Academy and the Star-watching Platform.

I didn't expect to find such fun even in winter in Shaolin Temple. In the dimness of night, we watched a new programme known as the Shaolin Concert in the Tradition of the Chan School. It was a concert held in a valley at Mount Songshan, which was a mix of Buddhist music, dance and martial arts, together with large-scale lighting effects. Together with the sounds of wind, insects and swaying pines, it was so relaxing, almost a meditation for the senses. The director-in-general and original composer is Tan Dun, who won the 73rd Oscar Best Music (Score) with the film Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.

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**Shaolin Temple**

Admission: 100 yuan

Opening Time: 08:30 — 17:30

Shaolin Concert Ticket Offices: Reception Hall of the Tianzhong Grand Hotel, Dengfeng County.

## Ancestral Images along the Banks of the Yellow River

The Zhengzhou Yellow River Scenic Area has been established for years. Climbing up to the Jimuge Pavilion, one can see the magnificent Yellow River running eastward in the distance. And last month, a new scenic spot was added, with images of the Emperor Yandi and Emperor Huangdi.

Actually, the birthplace of Emperor Huangdi, the recognized ancestor of the Chinese nation, was located in Xinzheng, Zhengzhou City. Emperor Huangdi led his army in defeating the tribe of Emperor Yandi, and the two were integrated as the Han Chinese, and the Central China area became united.

The Yellow River runs through Central China, fostering the Chinese culture, and is thus called the 'Mother River', so there is a special meaning behind the erection the images of Two Emperors at Zhengzhou along the banks. The huge images are 106 metres high, with their eyes over 3m long, and noses 8m. These images took 20 years to sculpt. The statues are connected with the body of a mount, and look as if they are naturally so. It has highlighted the traditional Chinese philosophical idea that 'The Nature and human beings should be integrated'. Visitors can take a hovercraft inside the Scenic Area if they want to sightsee along the Yellow River.

**Zhengzhou Yellow River Scenic Area**

Admission: 30 yuan

Opening Time: Whole daytime

Battery Car: 5 yuan for each section, with total journey 20 yuan

Hovercraft: 65 yuan

Cable Car: 25 yuan (round trip)

Transport: Bus No.16 from Zhengzhou Railway Station.

## Shuixi Banquets

Busy sightseeing for days, now it was time to sit down and savour the well-known Shuixi (Flowing, as in water flowing) Banquets. The Luoyang shuixi Banquets have been prepared for a thousand years. The best-known restaurant to provide Shuixi Banquets is Zhen Bu Tong (Genuinely Unique in Chinese).

A Shuixi Banquet is very dainty, different from other dinners. It consists of 24 dishes. Eight savouries are served first, four meat and four vegetable. Then, 16 hot dishes will be offered, four of which are not removed until the end of the dinner, and the other 12 can be divided into 4 groups in reference to similar tastes, with a major one accompanied by two secondary ones. When the dishes are prepared, they are likened to flowing water or clouds. The dishes contain much water or soup; that is why they got their name 'Flowing Banquet'; but actually, the 'water' flows too fast, and each dish was removed and replaced with another one before we could finish it. Because of their variety, you cannot have much of each, so plenty of them will be left untouched, and it is quite wasteful. I'd suggest you order a mini dinner, and ask for the courses to be slowed down a little.

The Shuixi Banquet uses a variety of foodstuffs, including aquatic products, meats, vegetables and fruits, and the guests can decide how much it'll cost. The dishes taste acidic, hot, salty or sweet, and what receives the most praise are those made of vegetables but tasting otherwise. For instance, some ordinary things such as radishes, cucumbers and noodles can be made to taste like bird's nest, and the Yancai Dish, a must dish of a Shuixi Banquet, is just made of radishes.

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**Zhen Bu Tong Restaurant**

Address: No. 369, Zhongzhou East Road, Luoyang

Tel.: (0379) 6399 5080

Price: The prices vary from 800 to 2,000 yuan, up to the guests themselves.

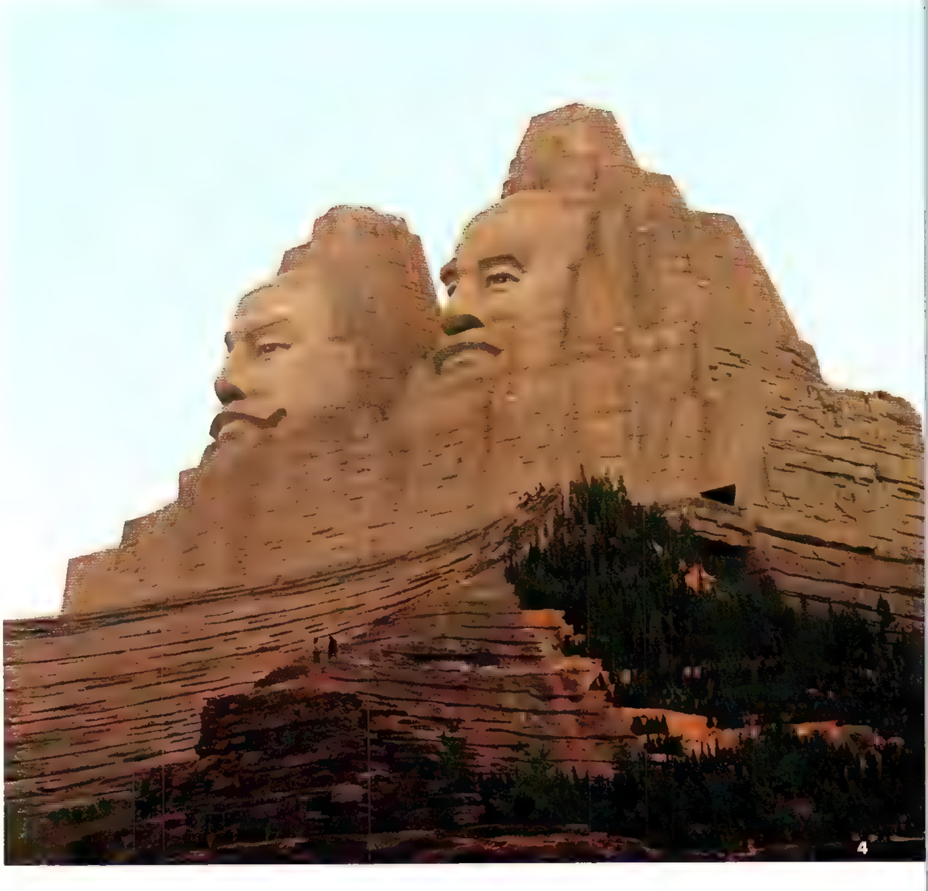
Transport: Taxis and buses are available in the major streets in the downtown area; minimum taxi fare is 5 yuan.

1. The Shaolin Concert in the Tradition of the Chan School was performed in a dell at Mount Songshan.

2. Shaolin kungfu can resist the attacks of swords and spears, which is wonderful, indeed.

3. Yancai Dish is a main course for the Luoyang Flowing Banquet; it tastes like bird's nest although it is made of radishes.

4. The images of Emperor Yandi and Emperor Huangdi are newly erected in the Zhengzhou Yellow River Scenic Area.



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1. A group of Hong Kong tourists met Chief Executive Tsang in front the Iron Tower in Kaifeng. (Photo courtesy of Mei On Travel)

2. A Hong Kong tourist became a son-in-law of the Squire Wang's family in Kaifeng.

3. Within the Huadu Spa in Yanling, Xuchang, there are many pools with various medical effects.

4. A new Pan Jinlian sells cakes in the Qingming Shanghe Park.

5. The image of Guan Yu holding his broadsword on the back of his horse at one end of the Baling Bridge.

6. The Building of Spring and Autumn where Guan Yu used to read the Book of Spring and Autumn at night.

7. Biding farewell to Cao Cao at the Baling Bridge, Guan Yu set off alone for a long journey to look for his elder brother.

8. Huayang Square International Grand Hotel in Luoyang.

## Huadu Spa at Midnight

Huadu Spa is in Yanling County east of Xuchang City, famous for its flowers. The spa occupies a large area, consisting of many springs with various medical effects. There was no other guest, so I felt especially relaxed and comfortable by myself. Here I was in the middle of the night lying in water and listening to the sounds of nature with my eyes closed; I felt extremely calm and relaxed.

What is worthy of mentioning is that the staffs here were hospitable and polite; in fact they were the best I met during this trip through Henan.

### Huadu Spa Holiday Zone

Address: On No. 311 National Highway from Xuchang to Yanling
Standard Room: 580 yuan
Spa Admission: 60 yuan for checked-in guest, and 128 yuan for non-checked-in guest
Tel.: (0374) 767 7999

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## Qingming Shanghe Park

Qingming Shanghe Park. This is a replica of the park depicted in the Qingming Shanghe Picture, a masterpiece by the well-known painter Zhang Zeduan of the Northern Song Dynasty (960 – 1127). Also known as an 'archaistic Disney', it presents the splendid architecture and folk customs of the Northern Song Dynasty in the tradition of Zhang Zeduan's brush-pen. From May to October, some evening tourist programmes are added, with admission half-price.

As for the Iron Tower, it is not made of iron but glazed bricks and tiles. This tower was built during the Northern Song Dynasty, and for a thousand years it has witnessed the history of Kaifeng along with the disastrous floods of the Yellow River.

武大郎炊餅
武大郎炊餅
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**Qingming Shanghe Park**
Admission: 80 yuan
Opening Time: 09:00 — 22:00
Transport: Buses No. 1, 15 and 20.

**Iron Tower**
Admission: 20 yuan
Opening Time: 07:00 — 19:00
Transport: Buses No. 1, 3 and 20.

## Guanyu's Study in Xuchang

It was in this building that Guan Yu often red the *Book of Spring and Autumn* in the candlelight at night, and this building was thus named the Building of Spring and Autumn, and has become one of the most popular tourist sites in Xuchang today. Inside the building there is an image of Guan Yu reading the *Book of Spring and Autumn*, and as for the architectural aspects, the Hall of Saint Guan Yu is the most grand and imposing.

**Building of Spring and Autumn**
Admission: 20 yuan
Opening Time: 08:00 — 18:30

## Baling Bridge

The present Baling Bridge is built with stones, and at one end stands a stone image of Guan Yu who holds his broadsword on the back of his horse. This place is quiet and serene, with weeping willows growing everywhere.

*Translated by Huang Deyuan*

**Baling Bridge**
Admission: 30 yuan Opening Time: 08:00 — 18:30

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## Tips

Transport:
Scheduled flights are available from Hong Kong and Shenzhen to Luoyang, the provincial capital of Henan.

Accommodation:
Huayang Square Grand International Hotel, No. 7, Jiudu Road, Luoyang
Tianzhong Grand Hotel, No. 22, East Sect of Zhongyu Street, Dengfeng
Sofitel International Hotel, No. 289, Chengdong Road, Zhengzhou
Jinyuan Grand Hotel, No. 2, Daqing Road, Kaifeng

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Food:
Sanwei Bean-product Dinner

Bean products are nutritious and tasty. In Sanwei, soybean milk tastes good, tofu is tender, smooth and luscious, and the dishes with meat.Here is recommended the Pot-steaming Acid Hot Soup with Mullet Eggs and the Quoyan Paper-packing Fish. These dishes are not very expensive, and one should not leave Xuchang without trying them.

Address: East Gate to District Bureau of Taxation, Middle Sect of Jian'an Road, Xuchang Road

First Building of Kaifeng

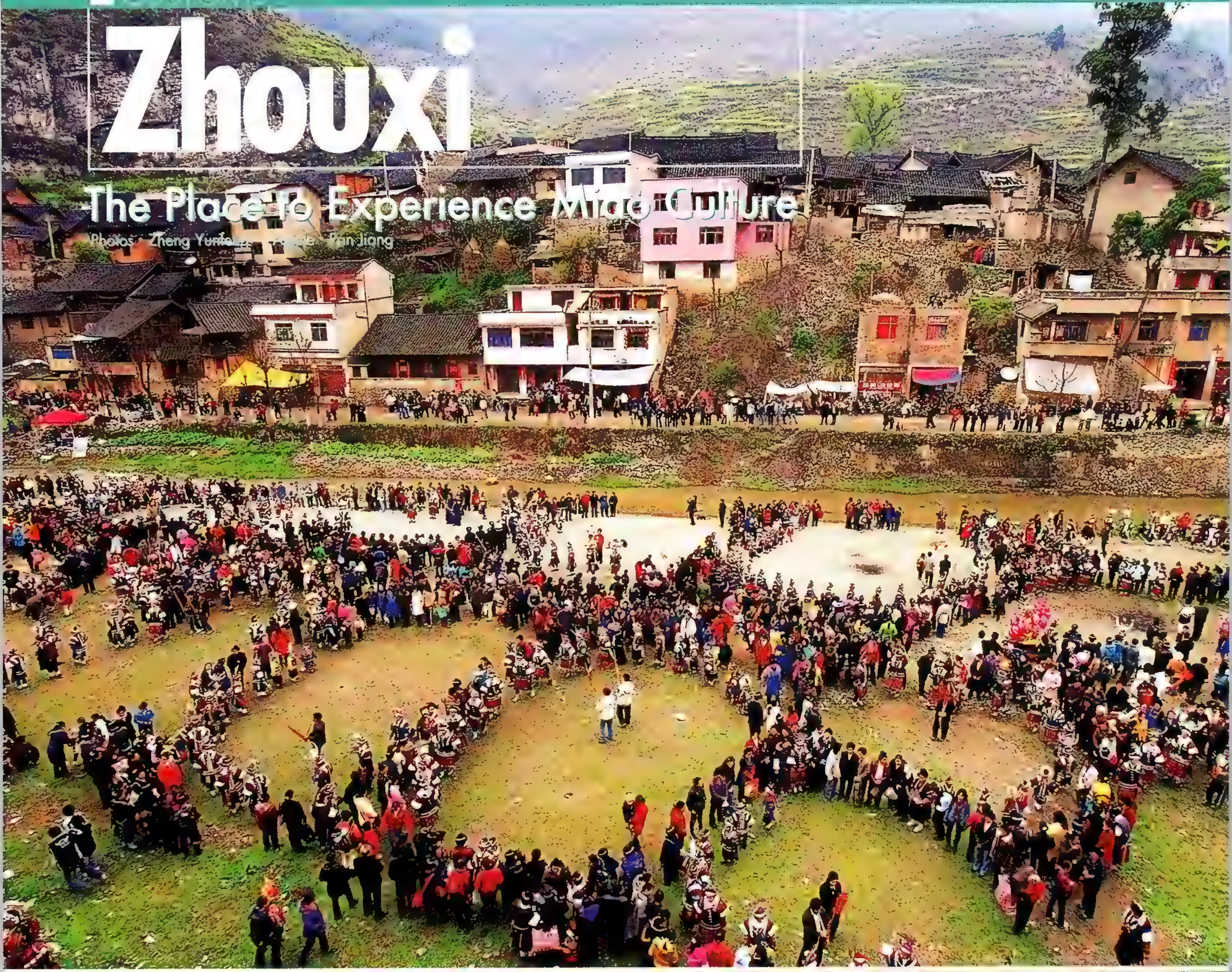
The best known is the Steamed Stuffed Buns with a Bamboo Steamer, whose skins are thin and stuffing is fine. The way to eat this dish is very dainty, too. One should first make an opening, then drink the soup inside.Take it at one bite, and you will have a mouthful of flavour.

Address: East of Xiyuan Park, Jiudu West Road

# Zhouxi

## The Place to Experience Miao Culture

Photos: Zheng Yunfeng [illegible]: Pan Jiang



1. The site of the Zhouxi Lusheng Festival.

2. Exquisite embroidery on the belt of a child-carrying bag.

3. A pretty Miao girl.

4. Getting decked out for the Lusheng Festival.

**The local customs of the ethnic minorities in Guizhou Province can sometimes be more appealing to visitors than the scenery. It is especially true with Guizhou's southeast region, Zhouxi. This Qiandongnan Prefecture is centre for the *lusheng* (a folk reed-pipe) culture of the Miao. It is an ideal place for visitors to experience different aspects of the Miao culture, all in one spot.**

Kaili, a new city inhabited by the Miao people, lies 150 km southeast of Guizhou's capital city Guiyang. At17 km south of Kaili, there is a small town named Zhouxi — the centre for the *lusheng* culture of the Miao ethnic group.

The Zhouxi area presents typical karst topography. The Zhouxi River winds through fields surrounded by mountains, forming a fabulous landscape. Of the local residents one third are Miao, who have kept their rich Miao culture and customs. The Lusheng Festival, which features *lusheng* making, Miao costume design, silverware and embroidery, the culture of wine, song, and a rich variety of other festival activities, make the place famous throughout Guizhou's entire southeastern region.

Come to Zhouxi in January after the Spring Festival, and you can catch the annual Lusheng Festival to experience the most traditional and indigenous *lusheng* culture of the Miao people. In the five days from 16th to 20th of the first lunar month, *lusheng* teams from all villages gather from everywhere in the region at the Lusheng Hall in Gannangxiang, Zhouxi, to perform in the grand Lusheng Festival.

## Lusheng — An Instrument of Courtship

*People in Zhouxi* start learning how to play the *lusheng* and perform *lusheng* dance in their childhood. Outstanding *lusheng* performers and dancers, either as individuals or teams, are highly regarded and respected by the locals. Whether a young man could play *lusheng* and perform the *lusheng* dance was once a requirement for brides-to-be. As the traditional musical instrument of the Miao

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1. Unique Miao landscape in the mountains.
2. Pan Bingxian, the King of Lusheng in Xinguang Miao Village.
3. Every Miao woman is a skillful embroiderer.
4. Silver bull horns are Miao girls' favourite.
5. Adding final touch with earrings.
6. Painting by a farmer artist Yang Zhenhuang, Scampering Bulls.

people, the *lusheng* accompanies the Miao wherever they go. In the Lusheng Hall, it is the instrument for young men to court girls. When a lad falls in love with a pretty girl, he will use his *lusheng* to play a love melody to show his affections while he dances beside her. Then he will play a tune asking for an embroidered belt — symbolically asking if the girl likes him. If she does, she will dance cheerfully to the tune and tie an embroidered belt specially made by Miao girls on his *lusheng* as a token of her love. After that, the two can date. The *lusheng*, has witnessed the long history of the Miao people and remains an essential part of their culture today.

Zhouxi is known throughout southeast Guizhou not only for its grand Lusheng Festival and superb *lusheng* performances, but also as a *lusheng* making centre for the entire region. The first settler in Dazhai, Xinguang Village was said to be a *lusheng* maker and performer. He settled there because of the large tracts of natural bamboo forest, an ideal material for making *lusheng*. Since then, *lusheng* making techniques have been passed down from generation to generation, each producing outstanding *lusheng* makers.

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There are 130 households in the big village of Xinguang, over 40 of which are engaged in *lusheng* production and processing. This is the biggest *lusheng*-producing village in southeast Guizhou, and the craftsmen can craft *lusheng* of any style and in the best quality. Therefore, *lusheng* teams in neighbouring counties all come here for their *lusheng*. What makes the Xinguang villagers more proud is that they are able to produce the largest *lusheng* in the world — the instruments come in pairs and there are now six of them, with the longest one measuring 7.6 metres and weighing over 70 kg. It takes five performers to play the giant *lusheng* simultaneously; the man with the largest lung capacity is chosen to play it (people with ordinary lung capacity can barely make a sound with the instrument), and the other four people will hold it.

## Every Woman in Mandong a Skillful Embroiderer

Growing up on a steady diet of Miao dress-making, women in Zhouxi's Miao villages are all good at embroidery. There is an embroidery village well-known in Zhouxi-Mandong Village, where every woman is a skilled embroiderer.

Miao embroideries are done with colourful thread, and mostly feature geometrical patterns rather than flowers. The Miao women can embroider without drawing an outline or sketch, relying totally on

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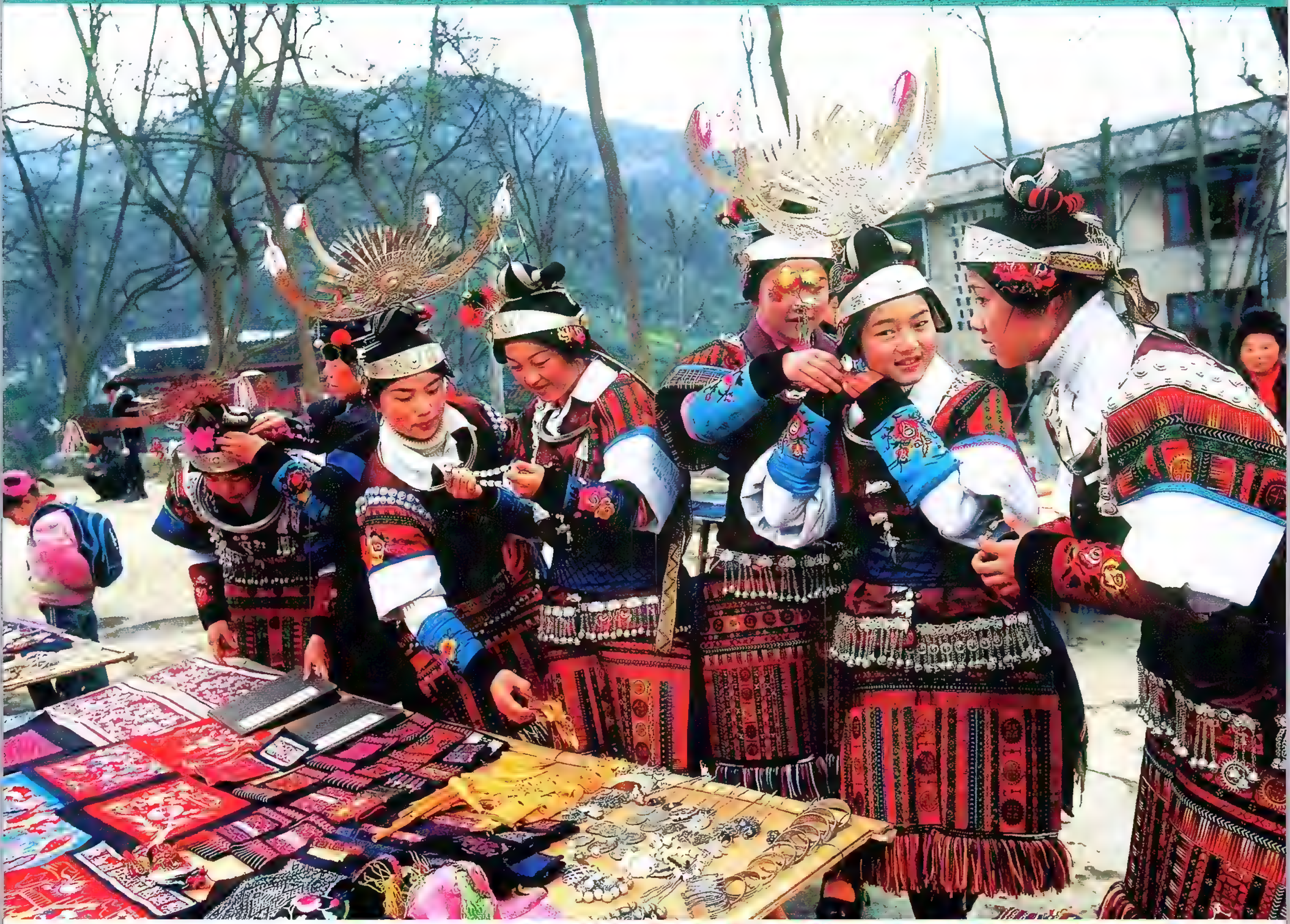
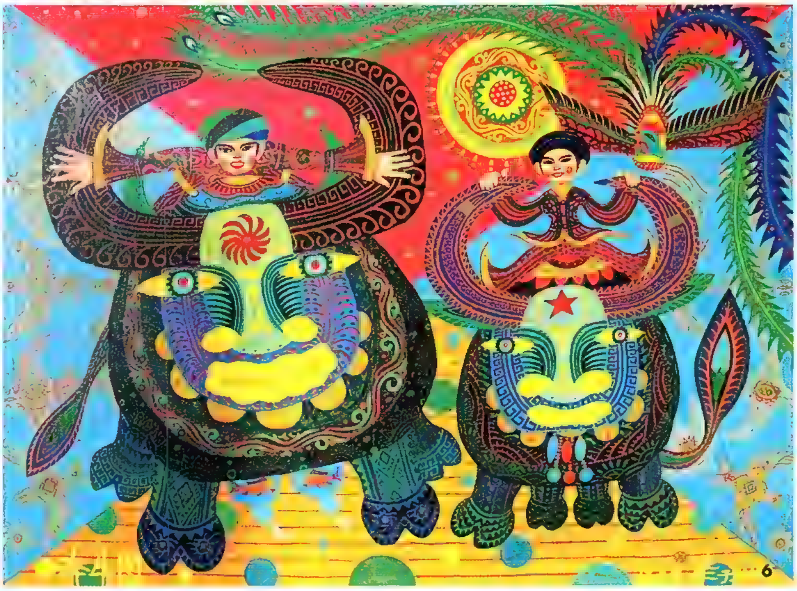


intuition. With superb skills and extraordinary memory, they stitch by counting the warp and weft of the base cloth. Their embroideries have no blank spaces, and are done with bold, eye-catching colours like red and green. Although Miao embroidery are mostly used to decorate clothes, such as the collapsible front of a garments, sleeves, handkerchief borders, skirt edges, etc., they also appear on bags and wallets. Once decorated with Miao embroidery, an average cloth jacket or an ordinary pleat linen skirt can increase in value by a hundred times. A nicely embroidered Miao dress would cost 3,000 yuan or more today.

## Silver Water Buffalo Horns

The traditional costume of the Miao women in Zhouxi, which is usually accompanied by silverware, looks much like the armour worn by ancient warriors. Legend goes that this has much to do with the old stories that the Miao women used to be fully armoured to replace men in the battlefield in ancient times. The costumes they wear today have developed from the armour worn by their ancestors.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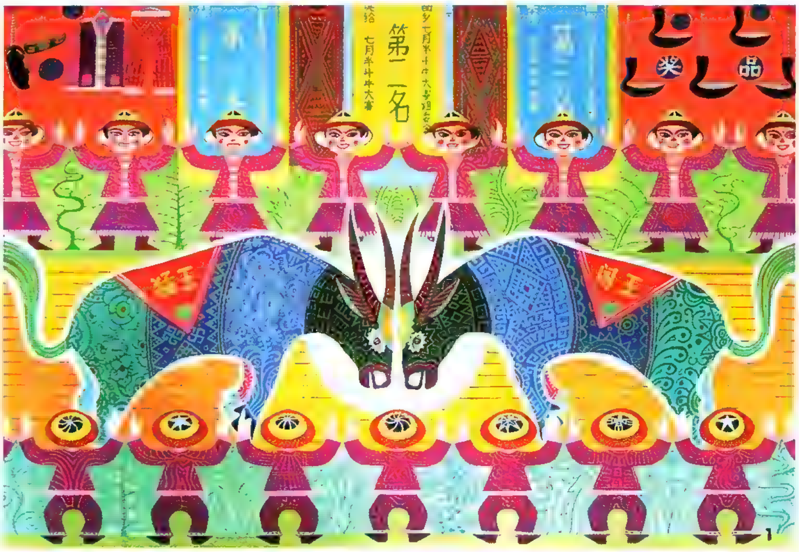
The complete set of silverware that accompanies Miao women's splendid attire includes: buffalo horn, crown, and flowers on the head; chaplet, necklace and lock around the neck; bracelets on the wrists; and chips, little balls, bells, pendants, etc. on the



1. The painting, Bullfight, illustrates this popular Miao custom.

2. Bullfighting is way for the Miaos to worship bulls.

3. Another highlight of the Lusheng Festival is the bullfight.

4. You will be stopped many times on the way to a village by the villagers' 'road-blocking wine'.

dress. Exquisite patterns are carved on all this silverware, each with its own historical account. The most eye-catching is the silverware of the water buffalo horn, which can be found in all Miao branches in southeast Guizhou. It comes in varying sizes. The silverware of the water buffalo horn worn by the Miao in Zhouxi are of medium size.

## Bullfight-Respect and Worship for Bulls

Another attraction of the Lusheng Festival in Zhouxi is the bullfighting. The Miao people's love for bullfighting comes from their history and their special attachment to the bull. Descending from a long line of farmers, the Miao people have become specially attached to bulls, keeping today the tradition of respecting and worshiping the bull. They often say that bulls are like their parents. The Miao are fond of bullfights, not because they want to mock the bulls, but because it demonstrates their special respect, love, and worship for the bull.

Bullfighting is a part of almost every fair and festival of the Miao people. After harvest each autumn, there is even a Bullfight Festival. There are

two kinds of bulls for bullfighting. One is used for both farming and bullfighting. Bulls of this kind are tough and strong, working in the fields during farming seasons, but are drawn to the bullfight ring during festivals. The others are used as professionals, selected carefully according to various standards. Such bulls, taken care of by experienced stock raisers and owned by a village or a clan, do not work in the fields but are put to good use during festival periods. A bull for bullfighting must have a large, strong build, broad chest, big head and horns, high forelegs and low hindlegs, long body with upright chest and contracted abdomen, and black, thick and firm hairs. Also, the bull's horns should be broad and firm, with rings in the shape of two narrow ones intersected by a wide one. It should have big nostrils, and fierce-looking round eyes.

During the Bullfight Festival, while entertaining their guests and themselves with feasting and wine, bull owners make it a point to feed their bulls to full with glutinous rice; some of the owners will even feed the bulls with some wine to stimulate and boost their courage. The bullfight scene is quite sensational. The first three winning bulls — the king, the champion, and the second — are highly honoured. The owners carry the banners or hang them on the horns of the bulls, and both the owners and the bulls are vehemently admired and esteemed. Starting from the 18th day of the first lunar month, bullfight will continue for three days, each day attracting up to 10,000 audience members, and the festive atmosphere lasts for three whole days.

## 'Road-blocking Wine' Repeated 12 Times

To truly experience the folk culture of the Miao people in Zhouxi, the wine culture in a Miao village is not to be missed. The fenced hamlet of Zhongping in Zhounan Village at the foot of the Hutou Hill has a charming landscape, nestled under the imposing mountains and the beautiful Zhouxi River flowing through it. A farmhouse complex has been set up specially to entertain visitors, and it is here that they will be able to sample a taste of the Miao's wine culture.

As is the same with other Miao villages, wherever there are major celebrations or honourable guests coming, hospitable hosts would arrange 'road-blocking wine' before the gate of the hamlet or his house. Running from at least 3 courses up to 12, each is guarded by 2 or 3 skillful female singers and speakers. They would first sing a toast to praise distinguished guests coming from afar before inviting them to have a drink, which must not be refused. The cup used for the toast is normally made of bull's horn. But you'd better be careful about taking the horn cup, for if you do, the whole cup of wine is yours.

Although small in area, Zhouxi showcases a variety of excellent traditional Miao culture and customs. Not only the enchanting Miao village landscape, but also the rich Miao culture and customs always make visitors reluctant to leave.

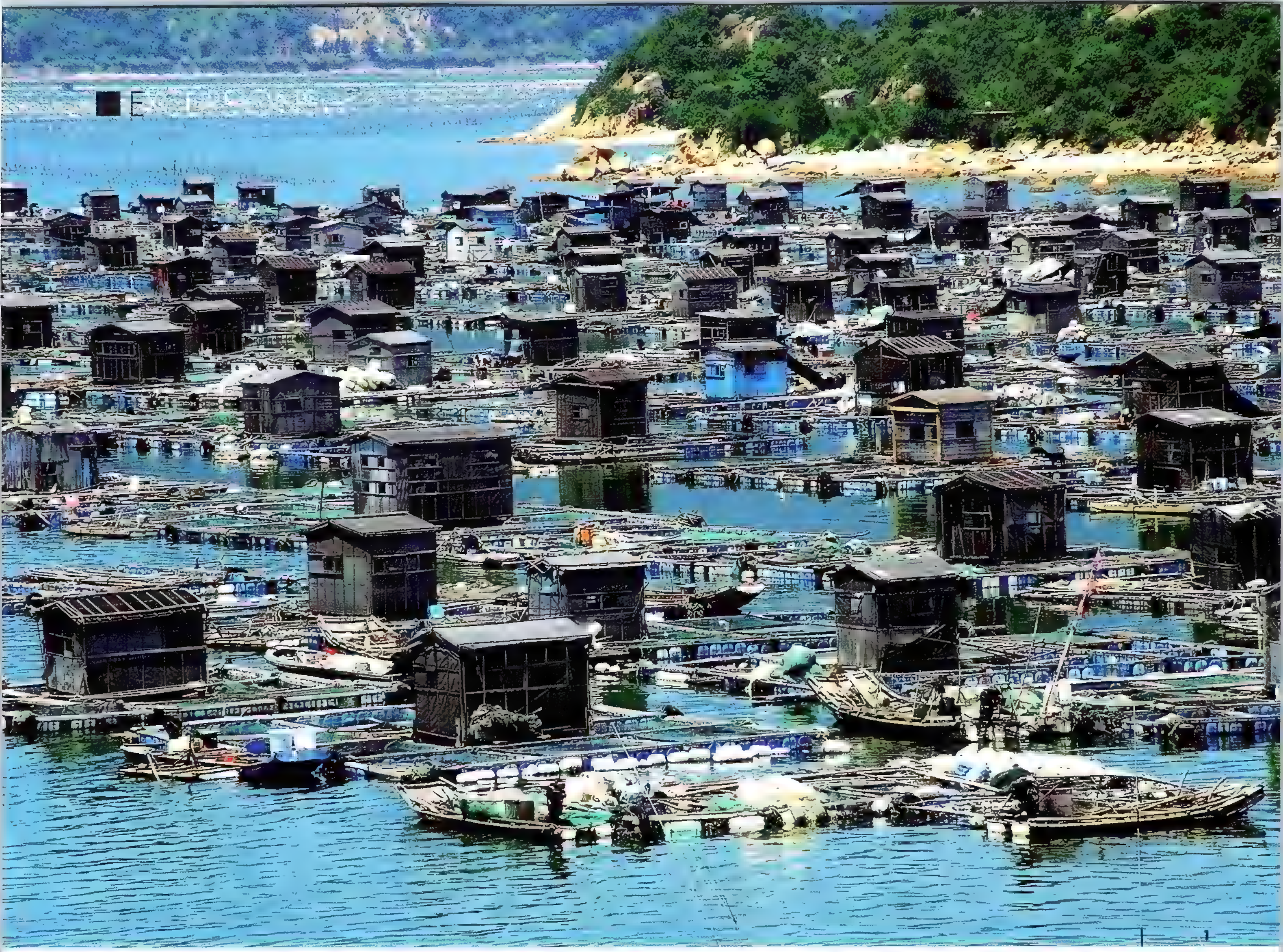
*Translated by L. Yu*

### Festivals All Year Round

As a town in southeast Guizhou, a region known for its 'hundred festivals', Zhouxi has many traditional local festivals. Besides the largest Lusheng Festival after the Spring Festival, there are also the Drum Dance Festival, Sisters' Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, New Grain Tasting Festival, Double-Ninth Festival and Longjia Festival, most of which are related to the Miao's farm work, and meant to wish for or celebrate a good harvest. The Youfang Festival (for group dating) and Hill Climbing Festival are created for the young. No matter where they are celebrated, Dingpashan or Changlinggang, the festivals provide the space and stage for young people to get to know each other and, hopefully, to find love.

### Getting to Zhouxi...

If you are new to Guizhou Province, you can take a bus from its capital city Guiyang along the Gui-Kai (Guiyang-Kaili) expressway. In two hours you will be in Kaili, the capital city of Qiandongnan Prefecture. You can reach Zhouxi, south of Kaili, by bus in half an hourfrom Kaili. Many snack bars and a number of restaurants are available in Zhouxi, serving tasty local dishes. There are some well-furnished hotels. There is a Niuwang Grand Hotel now under construction, which is going to provide better service in the near future.



# Having Fun by the Sea in Nan'ao

Photos & Article • Xie Liaosha

**Nan'ao, an island county near Shantou, Guandong, hosts the largest wind power station in Asia, huge mariculture farms and remarkable fishing village built over the water. Tourists can taste seafood freshly brought back by fishing vessels and enjoy swimming in the sea. Great people of the past such as Lu Xiufu, Zheng Chenggong, and Qi Jiguang of Imperial China as well as the regiment resisting Japanese invaders during WWII form an important chapter of the area's history.**

Nan'ao is the only island county in Guandong Province. There are twelve such counties across China. It takes about 40 minutes to get from Laiwu in Chenghai, Shantou to Changshanwei, Nan'ao by sea. Nan'ao is an island without industries, meaning it has pure and clean air. The number of negative ions in the air is 4,000 per cm cube, 10 to 20 times higher than most average cities.

Going ashore from Changshanwei, there is a flat, winding trans-island highway (Huan Dao Road). There are no traffic jams or tolls to be paid. It is delightful to see the hills on the left and the sea on the right. After the 10 km ride, you will arrive at Houzhai town, the capital of Nan'ao County, which has a strong rural flavour. Nan'ao's coastline is 77-km long and has 66 bays of various sizes. The whole island looks like a dumbbell, and is a similar shape of Cheung Chau, an outlying island of Hong Kong. The town lies on the narrow 'handle' region. The town centre facing Qianjiangwan gives off a feeling of warmth, missing from urban life. Moving forward a few hundred metres, you will be able to see the other side of the sea — Houjiangwan.

## The First Wind Power Station in Asia

Nan'ao is situated at southwest of the trumpet

2

shaped entrance of the Taiwan Straits. The strong southeast monsoon wind is perfect for developing wind-driven power. On the east side of the island, there are groups of wind turbines and most of them are concentrated in the Guolaoshan area, already a tourist spot. Wind-driven power is electrical energy converted through the power of the wind. Rotors, gearboxes, generators, towers...all the components of the system are controlled by computer. When the wind speed reaches 4 knots per hour, spinning rotors initialize the generator. The generator will halt automatically if the wind speed exceeds 14 knots. Nan'ao Island has 200 wind-driven power generators and they can create a total of more than 40,000 kilowatts of power and together, they have an annual generation of over 1 billion kilowatts. It is the largest wind power station in Asia. Seeing the business opportunities in this renewable energy, the China Light and Power Group of Hong Kong joined with Mainland companies to develop wind power projects.

Nan'ao is home to excellent fresh seafood restaurants and there are a chain of food stalls and seafood shops along Haibin Road of Houzhai town. In this well-lit street, there are a few large restaurants. Customers' cars parked outside the restaurants attest to the fact that many enjoy their weekend here.

Take this one particular restaurant. A great variety of seafood is available. The owner effortlessly recites off a long list of seafood items: sierra, melon seed, red porgy, grouper, pompano, marlin, as well as squid, cuttlefish, false trumpet shell, blood clam, abalone, shrimp and prawn.... All possible seafood is available here.

Wild brown-spotted grouper and sea eel are some local specialties. These sea eels are not reared artificially but caught by fisherman diving in the sea. A four catty sea eel only costs about 40 yuan per catty, much cheaper than in the big cities. The cooking

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**1. The houses of the floating fishing village have become a scenic spot.**

**2. The erecting windmills turbine in the dimming twilight.**

**3. Fishermen throw out their net against the waves.**

method is also unique. Eels are dry-stewed with carrots and they smell fresh and tasty.

After a fine dinner, I hung and saw a few mobile food stalls near the sea. Usually I wouldn't patronize such stalls but at that moment I just couldn't resist the delicious seafood smell spread by the sea breeze. We took a seat by the seaside and ordered some bottles of beer and seafood dishes. Under the lamp, the veteran cook deftly fried a dish for us. The dish tasted quite good. Eating while enjoying the sea view, listening to the coastal breeze came with whistles of waves, plus the smell of seawater made one so comfortable that you didn't want to move. Looking far off into the distance, you could see the lights of small boats on which people were out night fishing. Following the rhythms of the waves, the boats were floating up and down on the sea. Closer to shore, a series of large fishing vessels were at anchor. The fishermen often live onboard, forming a floating community of fishing families.

## An Amazing Ancient Well of Sweet Water

Walking east along Huan Dao Road on the southern side of the Island, the first bay on the route is Yun'ao which has been developed into a waterfront tourist spot. Resort villas are built on the hillside and they look elegant and comfortable.

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Turning left at the junction, walked along a little river toward the seaside. Some boats are moored in the river. The further I walked the more boats I saw. Finally, I came to a typhoon shelter where many fishing vessels were huddled. Most vessels were painted red at their bow, which were pointed, symbolizing good luck. Two big eyes were also drawn on the hulls of the ships which meant the ships would never get lost at sea. At the pier, people hustled and busted about busily loading baskets of fish from fishing boats, large and small, to trucks on land.

Yunaowan village has an old water well that can be traced back to the Song Dynasty (969 — 1279). The last chapter of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127 — 1279) took place here. Nan'ao, an island with extensive seafront and superb visibility, is a relatively safe place. 'The government in exile' retreated southward from the mainland and landed on the island. The emperor and his officials stayed in Aoqian village. There was a shortage of drinking of water and Premier Lu Xiufu commanded the digging of three wells. These were the 'dragon' well for the emperor, the 'tiger' well for the senior officials and the 'horse' well for government workers and soldiers.

The 'dragon' well and the 'tiger' well have still not yet been discovered. All we can see now is the 'horse' well. The well mouth has a diameter of one metre but amazingly its water remains pure and sweet even when the surrounding sea waves sometimes spill salty water into it.

The three wells were supposedly dug on the rocks of the hillside facing the eye of the spring. There is an abundant flow of spring water which dilutes the salty seawater. The rocks at the well's bottom prevent the seawater from penetrating into the wells. As a result, the taste and quality of the well water is preserved. During high tide, the heavily salty seawater flows into the wells. However, due to its higher density, the seawater will flow backwards from the rocks at the well's bottom. As a result, the well water remains soft and pure. Today a notice posted beside the 'horse' well claims that the well water can cure various kinds of diseases. Many empty bottles are also placed here. Actually, someone has become the sole retailer of the well water and it sells one yuan a bottle.

## A Pleasingly Unconventional Boathouse

The tomb of Lu Xiufu is another of historic site of the Southern Song Dynasty which is hidden among the Lychee woods in Qing'ao at the east end of the Island. The 'Premier Rock' is also located there. The

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tomb garden has the sea to its front and a green hill at its back. The descendants of the premier raised money and built a sophisticated monumental stone archway at the entrance of the garden so as to commemorate the achievements of their ancestor.

Not far away from the tomb is Qingaowan which is the most beautiful beach on Nan'ao Island. It is more than 2,400 m in length. The beach has a gentle gradient. Its soft sandy surface extends to 100 m deep into the water without any rocks. Novice swimmers should find it safe take a dip here. The water is unpolluted and it is always greenish-blue in colour. As a windbreak, 100m-deep woods were planted on the bay. In summer, the beach is packed with swimmers. Yacht clubs and entertainment centers as well as hotel and nightclubs have been built in Qingaowan.

On to Shenaowan which is located on the northern tip of the island. According to folklore, during the Ming Dynasty (1368 —1644), the area is a place where the pirate Wu Ping trained his marine soldiers and hid his treasures.

I reached the highest point and looked out. All kinds of things floated on the sea: grouper rearing nets, seaweed bamboo frames, pearl cages.... The water once devastated by battles has now become a place of cultivation.

I went into a house by the seaside and chatted with the family. Mr. Cai, the master of the household in Guanqian village, said that the floats called 'fu zi'

1. A wooden footway over the water at the Baishawan seaside.

2. Fishermen offer prayers at the Tian Hou Temple.

3. This Song Dynasty well is filled with sweet water.

4. Fishermen, returning from the sea busily process their catch.

5. This kind of mariculture farm is common on Nan'ao Island.

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1. Sun-drying 'hair weeds' on the highway.

2. Open space outside the Tian Hou Temple has become a playground for children.

3. Sculptures in the military cemetery garden show past battles of the past.

4. Emperor and officials during the final days of the Southern Song Dynasty.

were used for rearing oysters and tens of kilograms of oysters hung under every one of the floats. His family owned an oyster-rearing sea area of a few hundred acres. They have spent six years oyster farming which has brought them a handsome income. He said that Nan'ao has rich marine resources and has an area over 50,000 km suitable for fish farms. In addition, over a thousand species of fish, shrimps, clams and seaweed can be found in the surrounding waters.

Shenao's mariculture farm is another feature of the trade here. There are only a few interconnected boathouses floating in the bay and they are neat and tidy. The peaceful nature of the bay has not changed over years. Out of curiosity, we stopped to take a closer look at the fishing rafts of a boathouse family. We intended to order a couple of seafood dishes and to experience the feel of dining in the boathouse. But it was not mealtime and we could only hope to drop by again a bit later.

Striding by the seaside, we came across a single wooden hut. In front of the hut, there was a wooden bridge that extended out into the sea and had a large net on top of it. We took a break and sat in the hut. The resident inside was having a cup of tea while looking out to sea. Every fifteen minutes, he pressed a button and a rolling device pulled the large net into the sea and waved a long rod with a small net at its end. The large net shook for a while. Catching pounds of fish looked so easy. Leisure and labour became one. Many would envy his laidback work style.

## Military Recruitment by Zheng Chenggong

Shen'ao is most famous for its Ming Dynasty military headquarters. There is a 'recruitment tree' in the yard of the headquarters and the large tree trunk is so large that it needs ten men holding hands to encircle it. Beside the tree is a statue of General Zheng Chenggong. The plan to take back Taiwan back started here. The General's words 'Taiwan can only be conquered with me at the frontline' and became the battle cry for when they invaded Taiwan. In 1646, Zheng launched his first recruitment exercise in Nan'ao and he inspected his soldiers here, right under this banyan tree. The inspection rock is still on the site.

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In spring 1661, he led thousands of soldiers and landed in Tainan. After eight months of fierce fighting, the Dutch army surrendered and Taiwan's 38 years of colonial rule by Holland came to an end.

The west half of Nan'ao Island is a quite different landscape, with many hilly landscapes. The region has been designated an island national forest park.

At the entrance of the park, there is a large lawn with a few huge stone tortoise sculptures. It is known as the Tortoise Hill which was always been known as a place of good *fengshui* in history. Climbing up the stone steps, you will reach the summit which has an altitude of 587 m. It is the highest point of the whole island and you can view the sea on three sides. You can have a bird's view of the island and the sea.

In the centre of the park is Huanghuashan

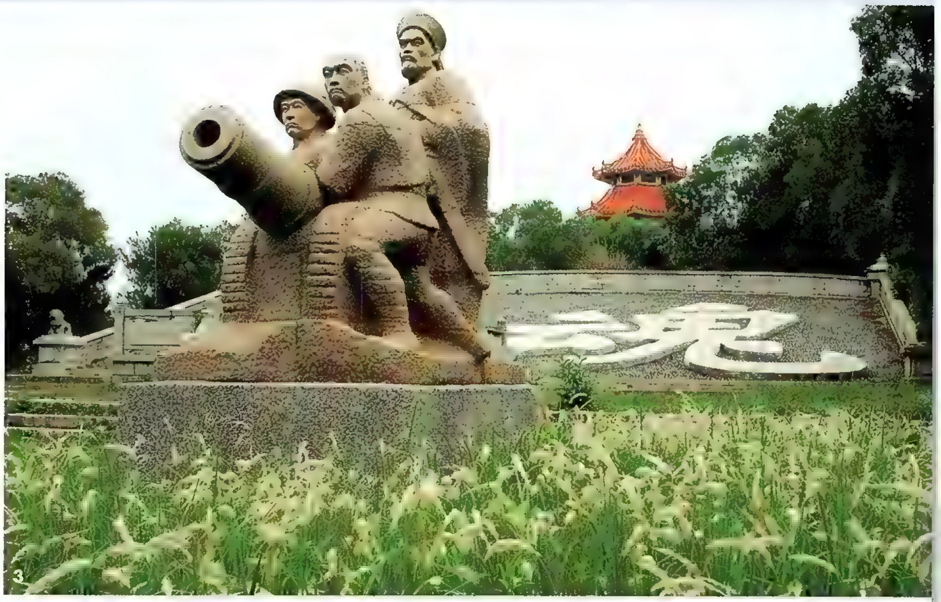
Reservoir which resembles a pristine lake on a plain. There is a monument to martyrs who tried to repel the Japanese invasion in the area and it is a symbol of the tragic history of the war.

## Resistance Force in the Bloody Battle

In June 1938, the Japanese launched air and land attacks and occupied Nan'ao Island. After Nan'ao fell to the invaders, the Shantou garrison of the Chinese National Party or Kuomintang (157th Division) and about 300 people of the volunteer regiment landed on Nan'ao in groups on July 14th and defeated the occupying Japanese army. On the morning of July 20th, the Japanese military sent five airboats with the covering fire of fighter planes and landed on the island. The fighting lasted for two hours until all bullets were used up.... Nan'ao fell once again.

The 117 soldiers who died in the battle were buried on Huanghuashan and the tombs are located behind the monument. A huge stone engraved with two lines: 'Bloody fighting on a deserted island. Noble spirits last forever.' The tomb garden is quiet. Only the sounds of birds, winds and waves can be heard. The courageous spirits can rest in peace here.

*Translated by Ezekiel Pang*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## Travel Tips

Transport:

Guangzhou to Shenzhen to Shantou City takes about 4 hours. By bus. Fare about 120 yuan.

From Shantou city centre to Laiwu pier of Chenghai city. By medium bus. Fare: about 10 yuan. From Chenghai urban area to Laiwu pier. Fare about 5 yuan.

From Laiwu pier to Changshanwei pier by high-speed boat. Fare about 20 yuan. Time: about 20 mins ; By car ferry (round-trip on vehicle ferry: 160 yuan; passenger fare: 20 yuan Time: 40 mins); From Changshanwei pier to county capital. By medium bus. Distance: 10 km. Fare 5 yuan; From pier to Qing'ao tourist area. Fare 21 yuan. The choices of public transport in Nan'ao are very limited. Getting to and for other tourist spots by taxi is needed. Hiring a driver and a car is more convenient and the daily rate is around 300 yuan.

Vehicles on the rehicle ferry.

Schedule

Laiwu, Chenghai to Changshanwei, 08:00 to 18:00 Freq.: every 2 hours

Changshanwei, Nan'ao to Laiwu, Chenghai 07:00 to 19:00 Freq.: every 2 hours

Accommodation

Houzhai Town:

Yindu Hotel

Rate: 280 yuan / room Tel: (0754) 680 7999

Address: situated on Longbin Road (Nan'ao county capital), close to the night market.

Jinye Hotel

Rate: 180 yuan / room Tel: (0754) 680 4068

Address: Haibin Road, Houzhai Town. There is a night market opposite with busy food stalls.

Nan'ao County Guest House

Rate: 280 yuan / room Tel: (0754) 680 3940

Address: Haibin Road Houzhai Town, Nan'ao County. This is located on higher ground and with sea view rooms.

Qing'ao:

Qingaowan Resort Village

Rate: 250 yuan / room Tel: (0754) 699 7437

The rooms with the best views are on the 2nd floor of the first row of resort villas. You can enjoy a view of the sea, the beach and the sunrise.

Qingao Guest House

Rate: 180 yuan / room Tel: (0754) 681 7242

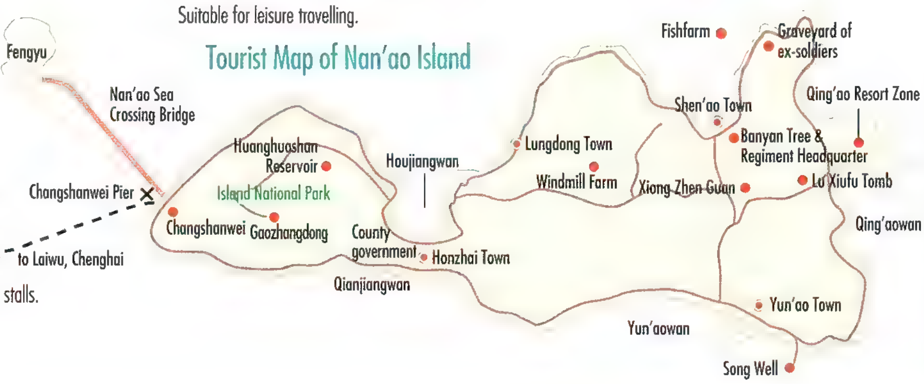
Address: Situated at Qingaowan, Nan'ao. By the seaside.

Haiwan Guest House

Rate: 200 yuan / room Tel: (0754) 699 7813

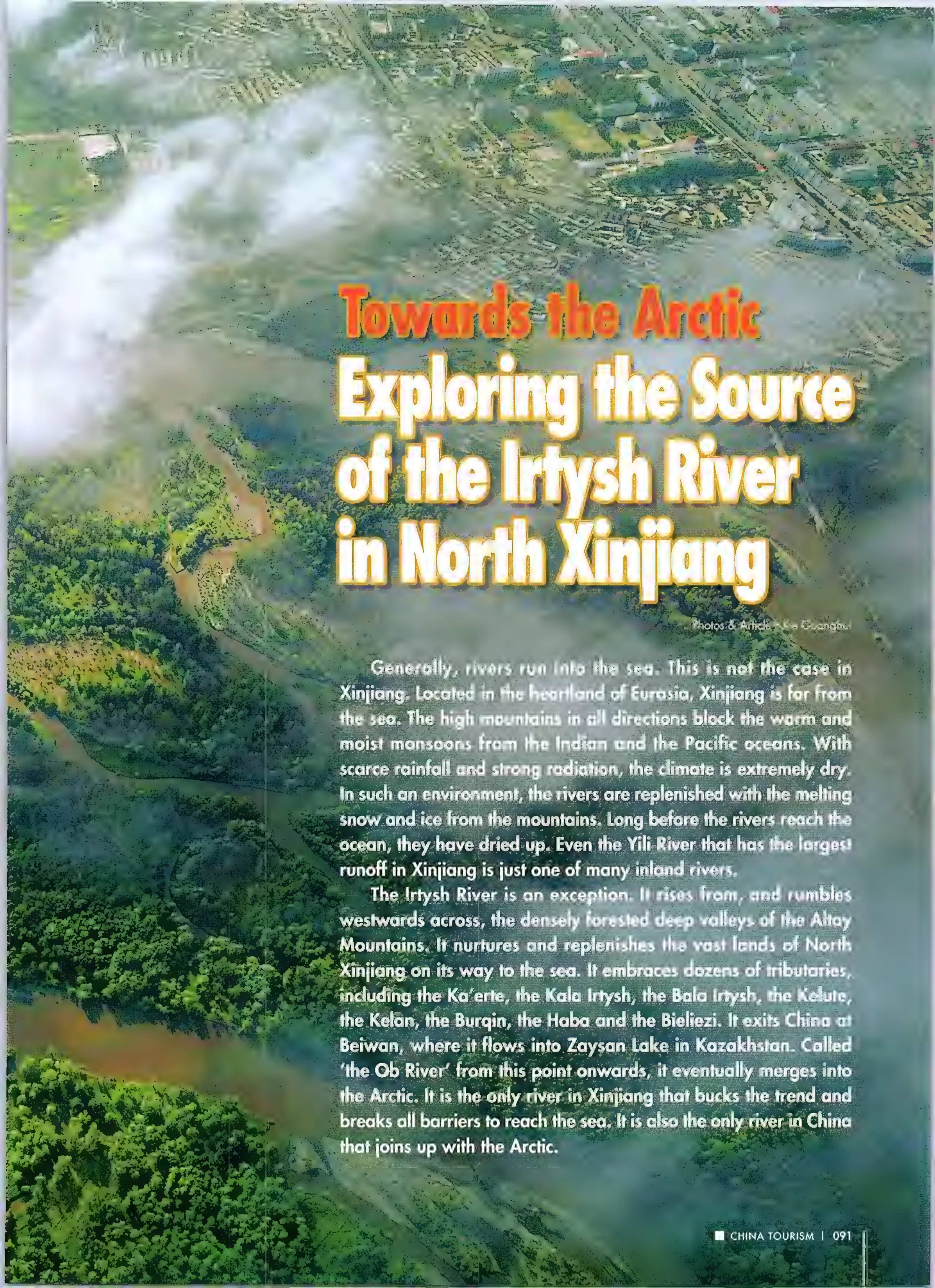
Address: Situated at Qingaowan, Nan'ao. By the seaside. Suitable for leisure travelling.

Shantou City
Nan'ao


Tourist Map of Nan'ao Island

Fengyu
Nan'ao Sea Crossing Bridge
Changshanwei Pier
to Laiwu, Chenghai
Huanghuashan Reservoir
Island National Park
Changshanwei
Gaozhangdong
County government
Honzhai Town
Qianjiangwan
Houjiangwan
Lungdong Town
Windmill Farm
Xiong Zhen Guan
Fishfarm
Graveyard of ex-soldiers
Shen'ao Town
Qing'ao Resort Zone
Banyan Tree & Regiment Headquarter
Lu Xiufu Tomb
Qing'aowan
Yun'ao Town
Yun'aowan
Song Well

Bird's eye view of the Irtysh River. (by Li Xueliang)



## Towards the Arctic

# Exploring the Source of the Irtysh River in North Xinjiang

Photos & Article: Xie Guanghui

Generally, rivers run into the sea. This is not the case in Xinjiang. Located in the heartland of Eurasia, Xinjiang is far from the sea. The high mountains in all directions block the warm and moist monsoons from the Indian and the Pacific oceans. With scarce rainfall and strong radiation, the climate is extremely dry. In such an environment, the rivers are replenished with the melting snow and ice from the mountains. Long before the rivers reach the ocean, they have dried up. Even the Yili River that has the largest runoff in Xinjiang is just one of many inland rivers.

The Irtysh River is an exception. It rises from, and rumbles westwards across, the densely forested deep valleys of the Altay Mountains. It nurtures and replenishes the vast lands of North Xinjiang on its way to the sea. It embraces dozens of tributaries, including the Ka'erte, the Kala Irtysh, the Bala Irtysh, the Kelute, the Kelan, the Burqin, the Haba and the Bieliezi. It exits China at Beiwan, where it flows into Zaysan Lake in Kazakhstan. Called 'the Ob River' from this point onwards, it eventually merges into the Arctic. It is the only river in Xinjiang that bucks the trend and breaks all barriers to reach the sea. It is also the only river in China that joins up with the Arctic.

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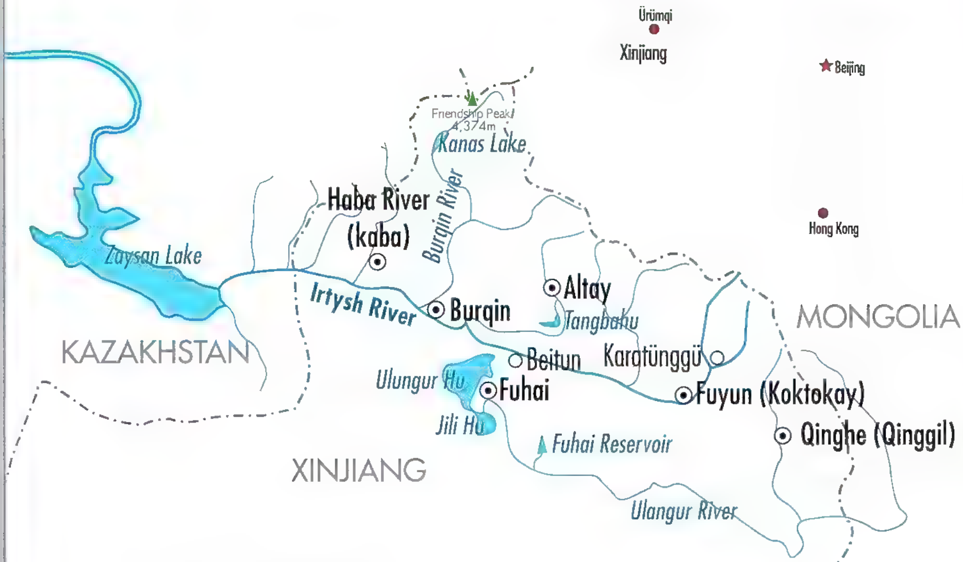
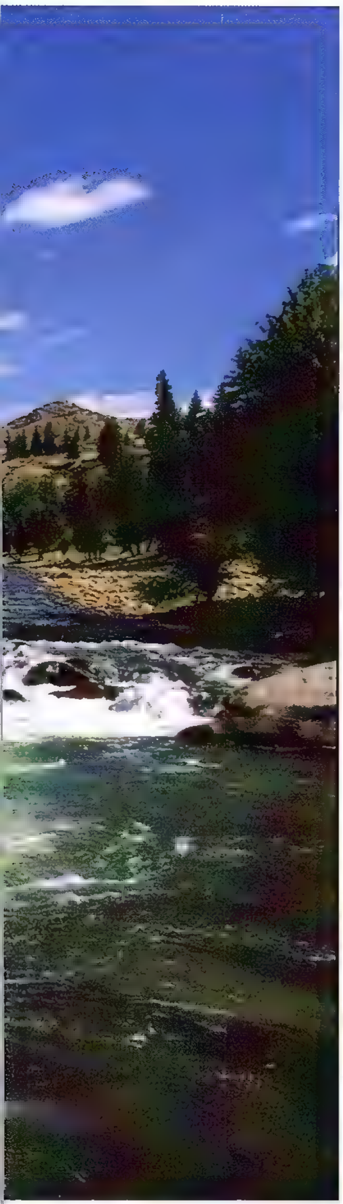

Ürümqi
Xinjiang
Beijing
Hong Kong
Friendship Peak
4,374m
Kanas Lake
Haba River
(kaba)
Burqin River
Zaysan Lake
Irtysh River
Burqin
Altay
Tangbahu
MONGOLIA
KAZAKHSTAN
Beitun
Karatünggü
Ulungur Hu
Fuhai
Fuyun (Koktokay)
Jili Hu
Fuhai Reservoir
Qinghe (Qinggil)
XINJIANG
Ulangur River

I had longed to see and experience the Irtysh River. I felt excited to have a chance to travel along it. The bus steered into the endless Gobi Desert shortly after it left Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and went north along the National Highway 216. Apart from a series of telegraph poles, I saw only wilderness. My mobile phone had weak signals or was simply out of coverage. Loneliness and worry crept into my mind, but in general I felt good — invigorated.

Straining to look into the distance, I saw a slim asphalt highway leading straight ahead, endlessly into the horizon on the seekingly endless Gobi Desert. It was a long journey.

## Rich Minerals in Fuyun

Well into the day the bus paused at Qia'erkutu Town to refuel. It went on to cross the Ulangur River,



left National Highway 216 and headed east. Before long I saw a canopy of green trees in the far distance. Gradually I could see the glistening water behind the brown forest — the Irtysh! I could breathe the freshness and moisture in the air. It was a soothing moment. More buildings came into sight. We had entered the seat of Fuyun County. It was said that there were over 140 minerals on the planet, and 86 could be found in Fuyun.

Fuyun enjoys much fame in geological circles. Some see it as the mecca of minerals. The town's fames is attributed to Mine III in Karatünggü, alternatively known as the 'Natural Mineral Museum'. Located 50 km to the north of Karatünggü, meaning 'green forest' in Mongolian, it is nestled among the mountains. The Irtysh winds its way across the town. Green mountains and clear waters present an attractive vista. In the 1950s, Karatünggü was the seat of the Fuyun County government. Now it looked more like a huge mine than a former administrative zone. The tree branches and houses on both sides of the streets were covered with a thick layer of mineral dust.

The great hall and guest house of the town retained a Russian architectural style. A wooden bridge across the Irtysh River was built by the Russians in the 1930s. It reminded me of a familiar scene in Soviet black-and-white movies. Walking across the wooden bridge and a further 100 m along the road for ore transportation, I arrived at the famous Mine III with a diameter of 1,000 m and 300 to 500 m deep. Standing at the edge of the mine, I found that the open-air shaft had been dug to 130 m below ground. Thirteen layers of spiralling mining cart rails led down to the bottom. The pit looked like a reservoir due to serious underground water leakage. The serene, still waters below belied the mine's turbulent history.

## ▣ Ta / Nb Ore a Magical Additive

Mine III was the largest rare metal mine in the world. Seventy-six minerals, including such radio-elements as beryllium, Ta / Nb ore and uranium 235, were produced in the mine. The Ta / Nb alloy

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1. The Irtysh River runs westwards.

2. Built half a century ago, by Soviet Union engineers, the high-voltage lines remind people of the past prosperity of Karatünggü Mining Bureau.

3. At the end of the 1930s, the wooden bridge over the Irtysh built by the Russians seems to be straight from a scene in the black-and-white movies of the Soviet Union.

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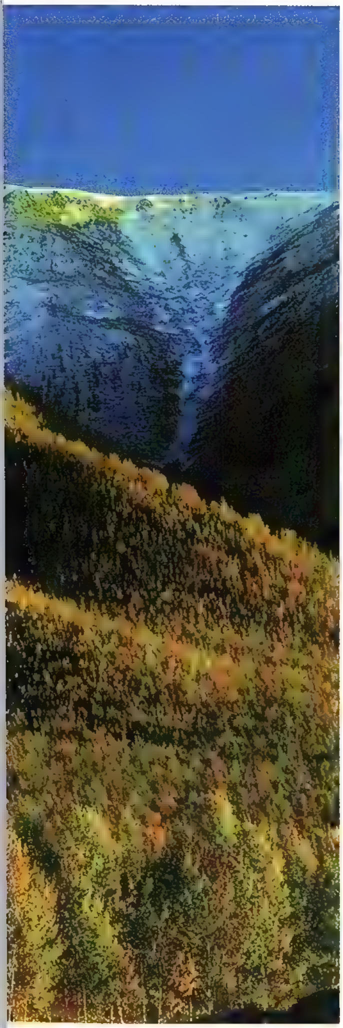


1. The Altay is known for its natural grandeur and rich production of gold and precious stones. (by Fan Shucai)

2. Mine III, once known worldwide, is now experiencing a second development opportunity. It will create wealth for Fuyun again, and help the miners of the past to regain their posts.

3. Mine III is the largest rare metal mine in the world.

4. Karatünggü Town, simple and small, was the seat of Fuyun County. The shop run by a Kazak owner shows the strong influence of this exotic culture.

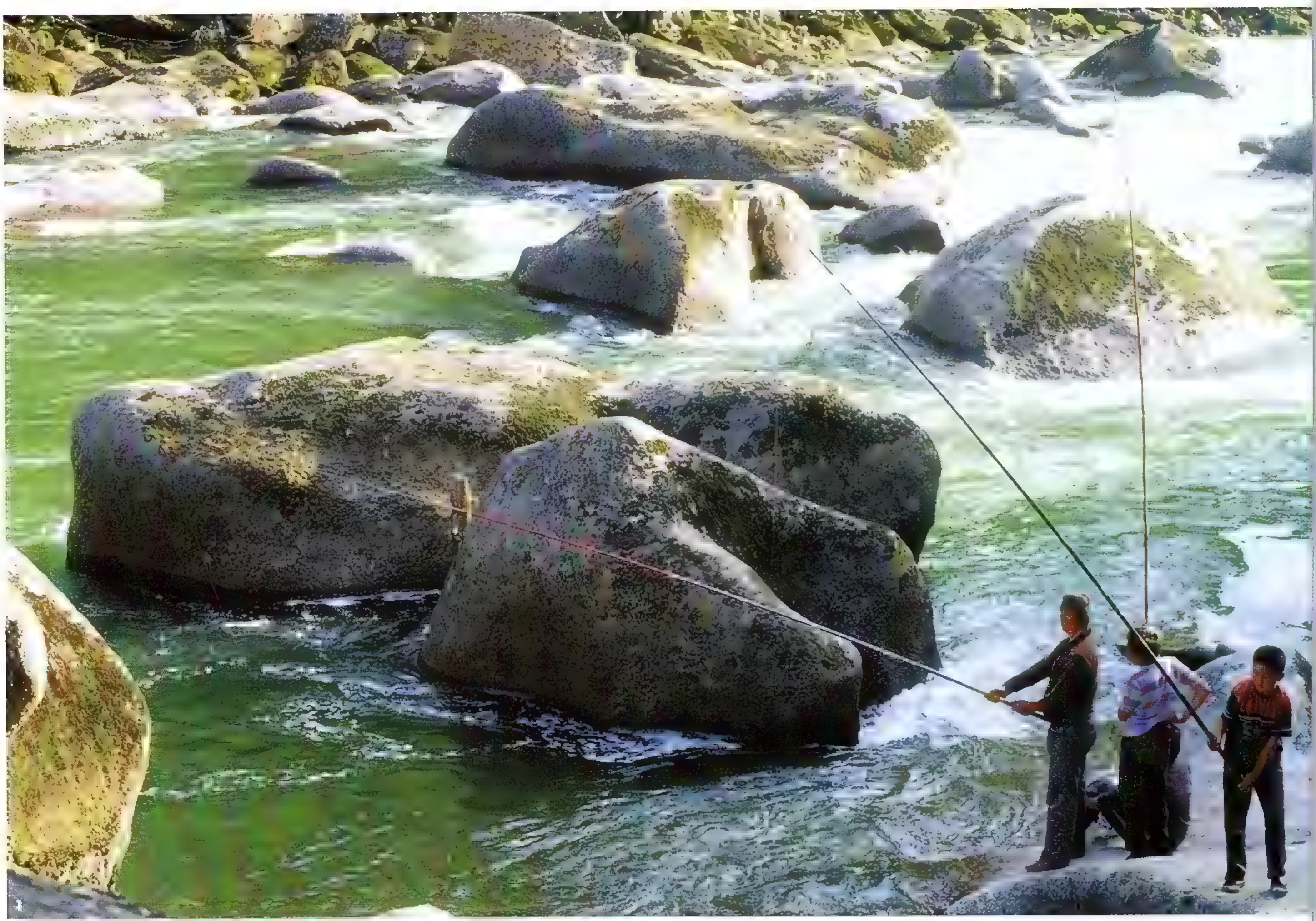
5. The houses built by members of the former Soviet Union can still be found in Karatünggü.

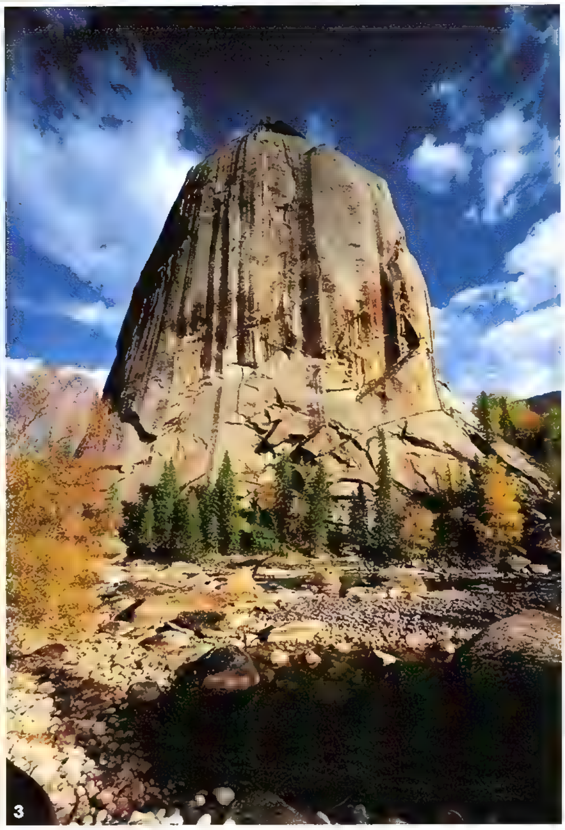
is a rare and unique metal. It features high-temperature resistance, corrosion resistance, heat transfer, electric conductivity and gas absorption. It is considered an important and almost 'magical' additive in the metallurgy industry. For example, by adding less than 0.1% of Ta / Nb into a certain metal, its intensity will increase by 30%. Because of this, it outrivals almost all other natural metals. The Ta / Nb alloy is extensively used in the aviation and military industries. It is an indispensable material in the manufacture of rockets, man-made satellites, and spaceships. Tantalum and columbium is very rare. However, Mine III in Karatünggü is endowed with rich reserves of such metals.

The Altay, which means 'gold' in Mongolian, has long been a paradise for gold diggers. Karatünggü is well-known for precious stones. A black stone of over 60 kilos had been excavated here, attracting a lot of attention.

## 'Two Bombs and One Satellite'

The rare minerals produced in Karatünggü belonged to the national defence military industry.





1. People fish on the upper reaches of the Irtysh.

2. A Kazak woman holds her baby in her arms while riding on horseback. The whole family is on a pastoral migration from the high mountain pasture to the grazing land at a lower altitude.

3. The huge rock resembles a holy bell. (by Li Xueliang)

4. The trail leading to the upper reaches of the Irtysh is treacherous. A push is always welcome.

Known to the outside world as 'Mine 111', the mine had been classified as top secret. The letters of the miners to and from relatives and friends were mailed through specially dedicated mailboxes. Visits from friends and relatives were strictly monitored. In 1955, the State Council decided to move the county seat out of the mine to a place 50 km away — now the seat of Fuyun County.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated. The Soviet experts who had been helping China were withdrawn. The Soviet Union requested that China pay back its debts. At the time, China was experiencing three years of natural disasters. Without cash to pay back its debts, China had to use the mineral resources of Mine III. To transfer a massive amount of mineral ore to the Soviet Union, the state allocated 200 lorries to the Karatünggü Mining Bureau. Later on, the mine contributed to the 'Two Bombs and One Satellite' (A-bomb & H-bomb and a man-made satellite), symbolic achievements of the nation's defence. It was said that Russia still kept the mineral ore from Mine III in reserves as strategic materials. In 1982, an engineer called Han Fengming in Karatünggü discovered a white, translucent, natural crystal when he checked the facilities by the Irtysh. It resembled quartz, but the substance was different. He observed it under the polarizing microscope and found the refractive index was 1.502, 0.044 lower than that of quartz. He sent the rock to the International Mineralogical Association for further appraisal. It was confirmed that the rock was a new mineral, never before recorded. Though it was only 5 g, it was unique. It was named ertixiite.

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## Exploring the Source

Just 5 km outside of Karatünggü, in the upper reaches of the Irtysh, is a forest park. It's a great place to relax. A further 18 km along towards the upper reaches, one reaches the famous Shenzhong (holy bell) Mountain Scenic Zone. Looking up, one can see a huge greyish-white granite rock on the south bank of the Irtysh. It looked imposing against the setting of blue sky and white clouds. It resembled a colossal bell, hence the name of the place.

Heading further up along the Irtysh, the valley narrows. Steep, rugged cliffs stand on both sides. The riverbed is full of granite rocks that have rolled down into the water. Some people were fishing. The valley is truly picturesque. The slope gets steeper as one goes upstream. The nomads would travel on the road on their annual pastoral migration. The road surface was messy with potholes made by the hoofed livestock. Our Beijing Jeep was close to collapse on such a bumpy road. The engine was humming weakly. On a steep slope the wheels skidded dangerously. We had to put rocks under the wheels before the driver floored the gas. All passengers had to help push the jeep. In a few cases we had to tie a rope to the front bumper and drag it, as well as pushing from the rear. After we climbed each slope, we were elated. After two hours of driving, we arrived at Jilande Hot Springs, the end of the highway. The road diminished into a winding trail, which was soon lost in the weeds.

## A Soak in the Hot Springs

Jilande Hot Springs consisted of two springs. One was at a spot five to six metres off the left bank of the Irtysh. A hut was laid with pebbles, covered with transparent plastic film as its roof to allow in the daylight and keep it warm. It was a simple but functioning changing room. At the rear of the hut was the hot spring in a cement pool. The other one, of a similar size, was on the slope on the opposite bank. It took a tough climb to get to the spot. It is said that Jilande Hot Springs is miraculously curative for arthritis and leg pain, among other ailments. A lot of people from Ürümqi visited here.

Jilande Hot Springs has no electricity or mobile phone coverage. At dusk I asked the guide how we could rent horses to explore the source of the Irtysh the next day. He waved his finger and said, 'No, no! You can't. It takes three days from here to the source. There are no horses here.' I felt let down. My entire trip to the Irtysh was just ten days.

As the Altay is of a high altitude, the melting water would absorb the heat in the valley after sunset. The temperature plunged and became chilly. If asked about the coldest spot in China, most would say

Mohe at the northernmost tip of Heilongjiang province. In fact, Karatünggü is the right answer. On 21 January 1960 the Karatünggü Weather Bureau recorded the lowest temperature of -51.5°C. At the beginning of January 1967, the lowest temperature recorded at Haizikou of Karatünggü by the locals was -57.8°C (unofficial record). It is the coldest recorded temperature in China (the annual average temperature is -2°C).

I was exhausted after a tough day. With no hope of the source expedition, I felt disappointed and went to bed. At midnight I was woken by the cold. I shivered in the damp quilt. Worried about catching a cold, I decided to have a hot spring bath. I walked alone to the hot spring, shaking in the darkness. Stepping into the pool, I was enveloped in the soothing hot water. Sweating on the forehead, I felt extremely cosy.

The sun was rising as I stepped out of the hot spring. Before leaving, I looked back at Jialegeziga Peak. Below the snow capped peak was green forest. A cascade of clear water spewed out from a crack on the cliff to form a creek. The creek cut a winding course on the steep slope, heading off to the ocean.

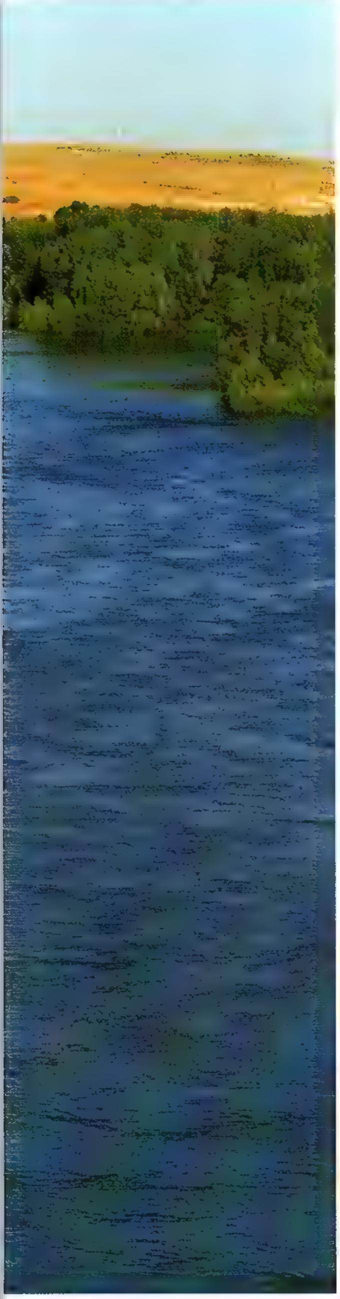
## ▣ Ideal Geographical Location of Beitun

Beitun is located on the southern slope of the Altay and the north rim of the Junggar Basin. The Irtysh River lingers when it reaches here. The water slows and swirls, creating an alluvial plain. As an administrative region, Beitun is just a small town between Altay City and Fuhai County. As it is the station of Agriculture Army 10 of the Xinjiang construction troops, the administrative level of Beitun is at the same level as Altay City. Why is Agriculture Army 10 set up in Beitun instead of Altay City? There are three reasons. First of all, it is for the transport advantages Beitun offers. Beitun is the transportation hub of Northern Xinjiang. To the south is Fuhai and Ürümqi; to the east is Fuyun, Karatünggü and Qinghe; to the north is Altay City; to the west is Burqin. Secondly, it is for the ample water supply. The Kelan River rises from Jiangjun (General) Mountain and runs across Altay City. It

**1. The Irtysh runs across Wucaitan, 24 km into the northwest of Burqin County. This area is considered to have the most beautiful Yadan landform in Xinjiang.**

**2. The monument of Agriculture Army 10 of the Xinjiang construction troops stationed in Beitun.**

**3. The upper stream of the Irtysh is the coldest part of China. The temperature can be as low as 51 degrees Celsius. (by Cheng Benjun)**



converges with the Irtysh River at Beitun before it flows west. At the rim of the dry Junggar Basin the river is the lifeline for residents. Thirdly, there is military strategy. Beitun is highly suitable for wasteland cultivation by the troops. In the Yuan Dynasty (1206 —1368), Genghis Khan (1162 —1227) had six westward expeditions and stationed all his troops in the Altay Grassland to rest and reorganize them. Deren Mountain of Duo'er Burqin (now Beitun) was the place where Genghis Khan dispatched his troops.

At the end of 1957, General Wang Zhen gave the order 'Open up the Wasteland, Garrison the Frontier and Develop the Altay' to the Xinjiang construction troops. Commissar Zhang Zhonghan led a regiment to the troops dispatching place of Genghis Khan and said, 'As the regiment is known for cultivating and Agriculture Army 10 is the northernmost wasteland cultivating unit in West China, let's call the place Beitun (north cultivation)'. In 1966, Beitun appeared as a small dot on the map of China.

The Altay Grassland has focused on stock-raising for a long time. There was a constant shortage of grain. In the first year when Agriculture Army 10 was established, they could produce enough grain for themselves. The start-up capital of the army was the mica from the Altay. The production of mica from the Altay accounted for half of China's total production. In the 1950s and 1960s, mica was a raw material with a small supply and a high demand in the high-tech, national defence and electronic industries of the country. Whether in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Chengdu, Zhengzhou, Yingkou or Inner Mongolia, mica was an indispensable item for the electronic industry.

Standing in Beitun Square, I gazed at the statue of soldiers of Agriculture Army 10 cultivating the wasteland. I saluted them in my mind.

## ▣ Exotic Burqin

Burqin is a tourist city. With its structure of two horizontal streets and one vertical one, it is a clean and simple town. The buildings on the streets adopted the Gothic architectural style. I had an elusive moment when I felt like I was standing in a foreign country.

1. The Kanas Lake is the deepest highland freshwater lake in China. It replenishes the Irtysh River. (by Li Xueliang)

2. Kvass, a home-brewed beer, sold by an old Russian lady are highly popular in Burqin. (by Ma Yiu Chun)

3. The two banks of the river were quite a spectacle in the 'water town in the desert'. The river produces over twenty species of cold-water fishes, including Huso dauricus, Brachymystax lenok, Hucho taimen, blackfish, white amur pike, perch and Lota lota.

Many people linked Burqin with Kanas Lake as it was the convergence point of all roads leading to the lake. When I arrived at Burqin, it was 8 pm. I had planned to go to the night market food stalls, but the scorching sun was still high in the sky. The streets were desolate. I changed my mind and took a taxi to visit Wucaitan (five-colour shoal).

The taxi headed northwest after it left the town. In a short while the beautiful Irtysh River came into sight. It was wide, and the waters were slow. The scenery on the two banks was different. On the south bank the oasis and the desert extended to the horizon where it joined the blue sky. On the north bank was the typical Yadan landform, in different colours and mysterious shapes. As the taxi halted, the driver looked back and said, 'Here's Wucaitan, one of the best Yadan landform sites in Xinjiang.' Outside, cement railings and a main gate were erected. Inside, a tourist path and viewing decks were built. Railings were set up at the top of the cliffs overlooking the river below. The scenic zone looked nice, and was well managed. After I bought a ticket and went inside, I found throngs of tourists who were expecting the sunset. No wonder few tourists were seen in Burqin! Due to year-round water, wind and sun erosion, the rock layers of the Yadan landform on the banks of the river at Wucaitan were rugged. In the setting sun the silhouetted outline of the landform was magical, mysterious. Bathing in the soft light, I felt like I was standing in a holy land of deities. I looked eastward from the windy viewing deck, and saw a dozen wind powered stations by the riverside.

## ▣ Best Barbeque and Beer

After the sunset, the sun's glow burned like wildfire in half of the sky. In the purple setting, the Irtysh River was extremely quiet. When the remnants of the day were gone, the sky became blue. Hungry, I returned to Burqin and headed to the night market food stalls. In the well-lit street, the air smelled of mouth-watering barbequed fish and meat. Some food stalls were fully packed with customers. Seated, I found a variety of vegetables in addition to barbequed fish and meat. The top choice was the twenty something species of local cold-water fish, including white amur pike, blackfish, perch and leucisus. With a slim body and two rows of pointed teeth, the white amur pike is a fierce breed in the river. It tasted meaty, yet tender and fresh, with little bones. Caught in the natural pollution-free environment, it is popular among the customers.

Beer was the best drink to go with the tasty, crispy barbequed fish. Locals loved to drink 'kvass', a home-brewed beer. As it was local and thus new to outsiders, it was well received. It tasted light and slightly bitter, but the aftertaste was pure, aromatic and sweet. It did not have the punch of normal beers. Instead, it offered an extra sweet and aromatic taste.

## The Old Russion Lady and her Kvass

Many people sold kvass, a Russian fermented beverage similar to beer, made from rye or barley, in the night market of Burqin. Gina had the best business. Nearly 80, Gina was an old Russian lady who could speak Kazak, Russian and Chinese. Her family was one of the last noble families of the Czar period. In 1937, she fled Russia with her family to Haba River County, Altay from the current Kazakhstan. In 1956, many of her relatives returned to Russia, but she and her family went to Burqin. She met lorry driver Grigori whom she married shortly afterwards. On holidays the courtyard of their family was full of guests. Grigori played the accordion and Gina took the lead in the dancing. She would present the home-brewed kvass to guests. Ten years ago, Grigori passed away. Encouraged by friends, Gina sold her kvass in the night market. In the high season in summer, she could sell 100 to 200 bottles a night. Not bad! As the business improved, she realised she needed a brand name. She stuck a square tape on each bottle, which read 'Russia Old Lady'. She made her own brand.

Located near the border, Burqin is influenced by Russian culture. In 1912, 300 households of Russian farmers of the Orthodox Church migrated to Burqin. In the decades afterwards, the number of Russian immigrant businessmen in Burqin increased to 1,600, 10.8% of the population of the town. At the end of the 1950s, a large portion of the daily supplies in Altay were imported from Russia through Burqin. In the 1960s, as the Sino-Soviet relations were tense, the Burqin shipping trade was terminated. A large number of Russians in Burqin returned to their country.

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## Beiwan, a Water Town in the Desert

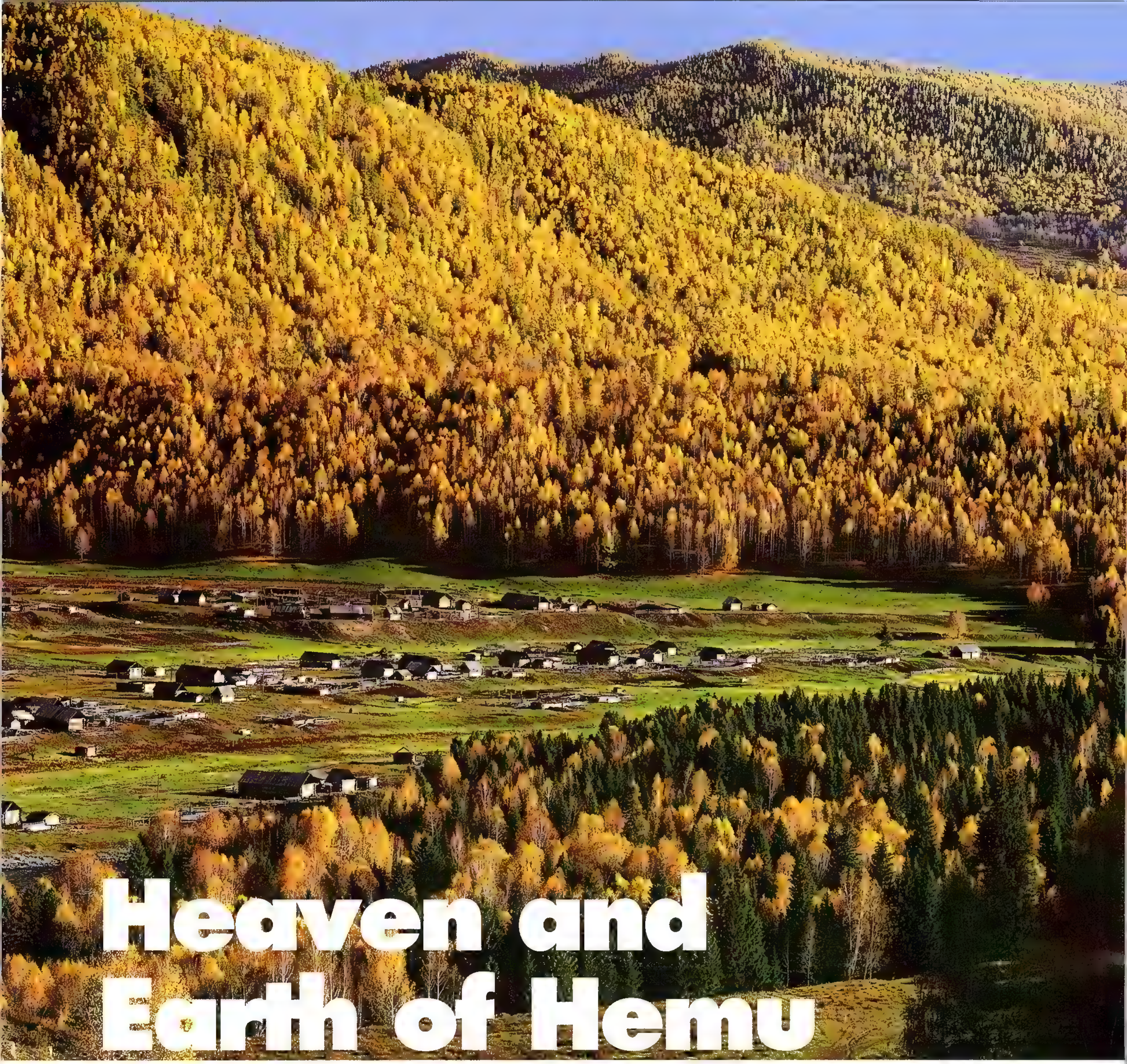
After the Irtysh is joined by the Haba River, it widens. The trees lined along the banks were a green ribbon on the Gobi Desert. The winding river is picturesque. Surprisingly, the place boasts the only natural gene pool of a number of poplars in China and diverse natural landscapes and tree species. Four of the five major poplars in the world are found here. *Populus nigra* is a particularly rare species. The two banks of the river created quite a spectacle. It is known as the 'water town in the desert'. The river produces over twenty species of cold-water fish. Occasionally one can see fishermen on the river.

## Plenty of Bugs and Mosquitoes

The Irtysh exits China at Beiwan and flows into Kazakhstan. A popular saying in Beiwan goes, 'Turpan grapes and Hami melon, Beiwan bugs and mosquitoes.' Needless to say, the bug and mosquito problem in Beiwan is serious. I confronted the bugs and mosquitoes in Beiwan in person and was bitten repeatedly until I became itchy and irritated. The saying was not exaggerated. The bugs are in fact midge, a greyish-black bug locally called 'small bug'. Mosquitoes and midges are winged insets. They bite animals and men and suck their blood. July and August are the worst season for plagues of midge and mosquito. All workers of the construction regiments hoeing weeds and watering the fields put on mosquito-proof hats wrapped with gauze around the neck and sprayed with mosquito repellent. Once the smell of the repellent wore off, the mosquitoes and midges would swoop down like mad. They kept attacking like the Kamikaze planes of Japan in WWII however hard you fought them.

The Alakebie River is a tributary of the Irtysh River and the border river of China and Kazakhstan. The rivulet runs slowly from the north and at times, is lost in the green forest. Two kilometres from the other side of the river is a small town of a population of 30,000 that relies on copper mining. From the watchtower of the Beiwan sentry, I could see the buildings of the town clearly.

Most of the rivers of China run from west to east, but the Irtysh runs the other way round the flat plain. Looking southwards on the sand dunes of the river delta of the Alakebie River, I saw an immense expanse of water and sky. It was an ideal fishing port. When the Aheitubieke Customs is open, businessmen from all parts of the region will have a chance to see the spectacle of this westward river.



# Heaven and Earth of Hemu

**There is a small village by a tributary of the Irtysh. The Tuvans who have a mysterious ethnic origin live in the mountain hamlet. On the vast Steppe, the Tuvans maintain a simple and unique lifestyle. Tense city people would do well to tune in to their relaxing rhythm and slow down to their pace.**

1. Hemu Village nestled in the Altay. (by Fan Shucai)

2. Hemu is the largest among the three existing Tuvan villages in China.

3. Building a logged hut and courtyard fence is not difficult for the Tuvans. They pick the right trees (pine for the house and birch for the fence), cut them down and drag to the spot. They stack up the logs with rabbets (or grooves).

I took a mini-bus to Hemu Township from the Burqin Bus Terminal. Apart from myself, all the passengers were local nomads. The bus left Burqin, headed north, and then steered away from the asphalt road at Jiadengyu and drove into the Hemu Grassland. The sky was azure, and the hillocks on both sides were covered with a thick blanket of grass.

Hemu is the most remote township in Northwest China. With Russia to the north and Mongolia in the northeast, Hemu has an area of 3,040 sq km, three times that of Hong Kong. However, its population is barely 2,000, less than one three-thousandth that of Hong Kong. The seat of the township is in Hemu Village, one of the three existing Tuvan villages in China (Hemu, Kanas and Baihaba villages) and the largest, northernmost one. The cold from Siberia crosses the Altay and creeps along the lower terrain. It condenses into ample rainfall as the temperature warms up sharply. The rainfall nurtures the dense forest and grassland. A tributary of the Irtysh River, the Hemu River rises from the Altay and runs across the mountain valleys. It lingers in the

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## Ethnic Origin of the Tuvans

There are a number of versions of the ethnic origin of the Tuvans. Some scholars believe that they were the descendants of an army of Genghis Khan. At the beginning of the 13th century, Genghis Khan led the Mongolian cavalry on a westward expedition. When he entered the Altay, he ordered an army to station itself in this place with green mountains, clear waters and luxuriant meadows, an ideal place for horse raising and cultivating. He conferred on the army a blue ribbon, a symbol of a high ranking among soldiers. A hundred years afterwards, the Mongolian empire collapsed. The lost army stationed in the Altay became the ancestors of the Tuvans. They lived on the land ever since. In the Ming Dynasty (1368 — 1644), the soldiers took off the blue ribbon and became common nomads. In recent years, some Russian scholars have pointed out that the Tuvans might be the ancestors of the Indians. Some Tuvans believe their ancestors migrated to the Altay from Siberia 500 years before. The ethnic origin of the Tuvans remains a riddle.

village before it proceeds further, adding a few charming touches to the ancient village.

## Logged Hut with Harmony

There were 800 Tuvans and nearly 500 Kazaks, plus a small number of Hans, in Hemu Village. The Tuvans settled in the place a long time ago. At the beginning they relied on herding and hunting. Their houses, stacked with pine logs of a diameter of 30 to 40 cm, are special. The one-storey tilted-roof hut in a primitive style was particularly suitable for the rainy, snowy mountain environment. The four walls were covered with pine leaves to keep the hut warm and prevent dampness. There is no decoration on the building, revealing a simple style and retaining a primitive essence. It reflects a perfect harmony of man with nature. Each logged hut has three railed courtyards, a large front yard, a sheepfold in the rear and a garden next to the sheepfold. The Tuvans put special emphasis on the fence. Wherever they went, they would erect fences to keep out the livestock passing by and prevent the casual intrusion of strangers. In the morning, the fence cast a long shadow. People who would collect firewood from the mountain walked out the rear fence. At dusk they returned along the same road. As time went by, a trail was worn by the fence of each house. The sheep and cattle could tell the trails. They would go to their own trails once they returned to the village from the grazing pasture.

As Altay is of a high altitude, summer is short and winter is long. In June, the flowers on the grassland come into full bloom. The Tuvans herd their sheep and cattle to the mountain summer pasture. In mid-July, the nomads gather all resources available to cut grass. In August, before the grass is frosted over, the grass cutting is finished. They transfer the dried grass back on horse carts. The dried grass is used as feed for the livestock in winter.

1. Herding is the main income source of the Tuvans. (by Fan Shucai)

2. Hemu Village takes the Hemu River as its border. The river runs along the west rim of the basin. The wooden bridge with an archway is the symbol of Hemu Village.

3. The houses of the Tuvans are special. They are stacked up with pine logs. They are warm and moisture-proof.

4. Some say the Tuvans are the descendants of the Mongolian cavalry. Some say they migrated to their current home 500 years ago. In recent years, some Russian scholars have pointed out that they might be descended from Indians. More investigations are needed to clarify the myth.

In mid-August, the nomads herd the fattened animals down the mountains. After that, they go to collect pine nuts in mountains dozens of kilometres away. The villagers prepare a plastic sheet, solid food, horse and quilt and set off together. They ride on horseback for two days into the mountains. Those are tough days. At their destination, they climb the pine trees and collect the pine cones. They put them on the plastic sheet till they are dried. They then hit the cones with a rod to get the nuts.

## ▣ Snow Seal-up

In late September, the first snow of the year will fall. The snow melts the next day. Shortly after that the grassland which was previously a wavy blanket of grass, is now white, not green. The breeze turns into a chilly autumn wind. The leaves of the trees on the mountains take on an assortment of gold, brown and red. The tourists here are almost all photographers with heavy gear. It is harvest season for them too. At the beginning of October, snow falls day after day and the tourists leave Hemu Village. The small village returns to its usual peace. Once the snow falls, the mountains are sealed up (with 1.5 m thick snow on average). The villagers have stocked up on supplies before the snowfall. They stay in the village throughout the winter. If they want to go to Burqin,

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they have to use a sleigh and travel for three days over the snow-covered land.

The snow in Hemu in winter is thick. The sheep cannot feed on any snow-covered grass. The Tuvans raise few sheep. Instead, they prefer cattle, horse and other larger animals. They plant barely no vegetables due to the cold weather, but grow a small amount of potato and wheat. Of a small size, the potato tastes great.

Hemu Village is full of signboards now, 'mountain lodge', 'hotel', 'restaurant', 'store', etc. I thought that the Tuvans had cultivated an awareness of business. In fact, only a small number of locals will lease the logged huts. Most of the brand-new logged huts were built by outsiders who did business trading in Tuvan resources. Many old Tuvan people do not speak Chinese. The Tuvan language belongs to the Turkic language in the Altay family of languages. They do not have written words. The Tuvans grow up on the Steppe and are good horse riders. Youngsters of just two or three ride by on horseback. They are hired to 'act out' their culture for tourists at the price of 20 yuan per half hour. It is at least so tourist income for the Tuvans.

## Koumiss Brewing in Every Family

The Tuvans have round faces, high cheekbones and hooded eyelids. They love to wear Mongolian costumes, which are colourful and require a satin waistband. They also love to wear leather boots and felt boots. On holidays and wedding days, Tuvan men will wear a hat, and Tuvan women will put on a

1. A rainbow after the rainfall in the forest. (by Li Xueliang)

2. June and July are the flower season of the Hemu Grassland. Beekeepers from all over the country will camp here.

3. Tourists put on Mongolian costumes and head for the Aobao for religious rituals according to the local customs.

4. The Tuvans love drinking. Almost every family knows how to brew koumiss, or milk wine.

flowery scarf. Their diet is chiefly dairy products, beef, mutton and flour. They are born optimists, and hospitable hosts. They will invite the guest into the house, and sit crossed-leg on the ground by the small table. The host will present milk tea, yogurt, milk granules, ghee and deepfried flour snacks. The guest must drink two bowls of milk tea in a Tuvan family. According to the local custom, even numbers indicate peace and luck. After tea is served, the host will present koumiss, or milk wine, to the guest. They will also sing a song to toast the guest, and serve boiled mutton. There must be a sheep head on the plate of mutton. The host will hand a knife to the guest. The guest should cut a piece from the sheep's ear and a piece of meat, and eat them together. He should then return the knife to the host. The host will cut the meat into pieces. The guest can use their hands with the mutton.

The Tuvans love drinking. Almost every family knows how to brew koumiss. To brew koumiss, cow milk is put into a leather bag to ferment for four or five days (depending on the temperature).

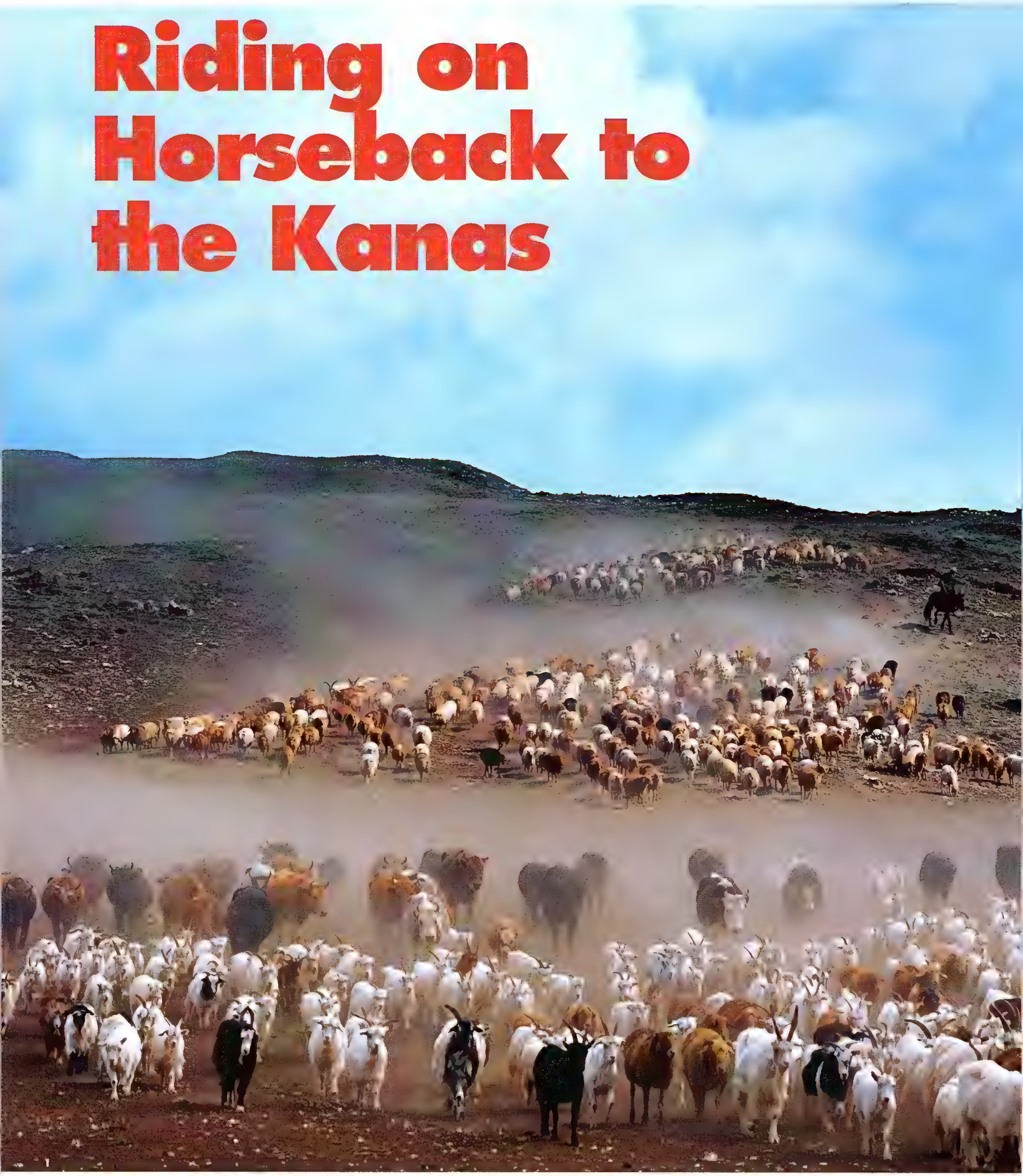
In the early morning, I arrived at the home of Jiayilawu. Jiayilawu was in her thirties and plump, wearing a red blouse, plaid skirt and blue, flowery apron. She had a coiled bun of hair on her head. She was carrying a bucket of clear water from the Hemu River and walking towards the fence. By a stove she used a rod to stir the milk in the leather bag. I smelled a strong aroma of yogurt. She poured the white milk into an iron pot, covered with a wooden bucket and a pot on top. The wooden bucket was a chunk of hollowed poplar, with a small hole on the side. A wooden trough was inserted into the hole. Right under the tip of the trough was a wine bottle. Jiayilawu squatted to light a match and then the firewood inside the stove. After a short while, the stove was hot with flames. The yogurt in the pot started to steam. Jiayilawu scooped cold water from the bucket and added it into the small pot on top. The steam turned into liquid after it contacted the cold water. The distilled liquid was koumiss. It flew along the wooden trough into the wine pot. The air was permeated with the fresh aroma of koumiss. Jiayilawu held the first bowl of koumiss. She then poured another bowl of koumiss to present it to me. I took the white porcelain bowl and found that the koumiss was transparent. I sipped the wine. It was not too strong, and tasted a bit sour. I returned the bowl to her, and she sipped the wine before she returned it again to me. I took the bowl and drank it in one go. That was the toasting custom of the Tuvans. About 5 to 6 kilos of milk makes 1 kilo of koumiss. The deposit left over after the koumiss brewing could be filtered with gauze. When it dries, it becomes milk granules, a daily snack of the nomads. It is chewy and tastes sour.

## Image of Genghis Khan Worshipped

Every Tuvan family worshipped an image of Genghis Khan in the most noticeable spot in the hut. The image was surrounded with colourful felt. It was the most distinctive characteristic of the Tuvan family. The Tuvans have three important festivals, Spring Festival, Aobao Festival and Zoulu Festival (Lighting Festival). Like the Hans, the Tuvans celebrate the Spring Festival, but in different ways. During the Spring Festival season, the mountains are sealed up by snow. The rivers are frozen. The Tuvans put on their best costumes, and hold horse racing, archery and wrestling events. All the villagers sing, dance and drink to the full. Lamas chant passages from scripture.

The Aobao Festival is the time when the Tuvans hold ritual activities. Aobao, meaning 'mound', was said to be the mound marking roads and borders. Later it became a rock mound where rituals were performed for the mountain gods and road gods. People stacked rocks into a mound, and stuck willow branches and poles on top. The festival is held in June every year. During the festive season, parents with sons and daughters put on their new costumes, and gather around the Aobao to present sheep, wine and yogurt. They will burn incense, candles and kneel before the mound. Shaman will perform dancing. At the end of the rituals, people will throw candies, dairy snacks and other food to the sky, praying for luck, good weather, peace, health and prosperity of the livestock. After that, the Tuvans will hold horse racing, wrestling and archery event and other traditional activities. The Zoulu Festival is held on the 25th of October in the lunar calendar. It is a festival unique to the Tuvans. The nomads who have worked on the mountain pastures all through summer and autumn will return to the village. It is a time to commemorate the passing of a living buddha.

# Riding on Horseback to the Kanas



1. In summer, the nomads herd the cattle and sheep to the high mountain pastures. (by Fan Shucai)

2. The yurt is a moveable home of the nomads on the Steppe.

3. The horse is the most basic transportation tool on the Steppe. Almost all kids know horse riding.

**Usually people visit the Kanas Lake by taking a shuttle bus from Jiadengyu. Following a Kazak nomad, I rode on horseback from Hemu 40 km from the lake. On the way, I passed by forests and lakes, and visited a Kazak nomad family on the Steppe. I had unforgettable memories though my whole body ached from the tough day of horse riding.**

I stayed in Hemu, a village at the northwest tip of China, for a few days. Every day I went to watch the homebound herds at dusk at the entrance to the village. Nightfall is quite late in summer at this latitude. After 10 pm the sun starts to set. The sunset timing is perfect for modern city youngsters who stay up late past midnight and rise late the next day. However, the life here is so monotonous that it may bore them to death.

Out of the blue, a young Kazak man came up to

me. 'Hi, are you going to Kanas tomorrow?' I looked at him carefully. He thought that I was hesitating, and said conspiratorially. 'Ride a horse to Kanas and you won't need to pay the admission fee.' His words intrigued me and I asked him about the trip. His name was Halei. He ran a restaurant by Kanas Lake. In the past few years the number of tourists to Kanas doubled. His business was booming. However, flocks of tourists brought serious pollution to the zone. In 2005 the administration committee of Kanas moved the ticket office, vehicle transit, restaurants, shops and hotels to Jiadengyu 30 km away from scenic zone. Sightseeing and living areas were separated. Halei's restaurant was also moved. That was why he was in Hemu. This morning he had sent a chef from Kanas to Hemu. Tomorrow he would return to Kanas with a free horse. I thought that the 40 km mountain trail to Kanas was perfect for horse riding. There would be few tourists along the way. The forests, pastures and snow-covered mountains would be fantastic. I accepted his offer, willing to give him the admission fee too. He was excited. 'Deal!' He then spurred the horse, rushed off and disappeared.

## Setting off in Sun's First Rays

In the early morning, I was still sleepy. Opening the door, I found the stars were still twinkling. But the morning wind soon freshened me up. In the short distance, Halei dragged the reins of two strong horses on the bridge. There was a rising fog on the river. The scene had the solemnity of setting off for a battle. The Xinjiang horse is the tallest breed among all domestic species. I looked up to caress the horse's neck and mane. The creature shook his ears, looking energetic and yet mellow in the eyes. The silverware and copperware on the saddle shone with primitive glory.

1. Tired after a pastoral migration, a Kazak falls asleep in his yurt.

2. Camel is the largest animal of the nomads. It plays an important role in pastoral migration.

3. Yurts are seen everywhere on the Steppe. In some places yurt are used for tourism. It is a good way to help tourists experience the life of nomads by receiving them in a yurt.

4. The stone men were the tomb protectors of the ancestors of the nomads. They are also a typical cultural relic on the Steppe.

I stepped on the saddle iron and mounted the horse. I felt proud and mighty with a high viewpoint. The horse, however, would not more across the wooden bridge however much I ordered him. Finally, I had to wade across the river! The water, luckily, was not deep. The horse stepped into the water, not scared at all. Instead, I was worried about falling into the river. If that happened, my cameras, lenses and films were all finished. Getting back on solid land, I sighed with relief.

## Sweating Horses but no cold water

We went through a birch grove. The tree trunks were not as white as I had expected. A flat slope followed. Halei said that riding a horse uphill, one should release the reins and lean forward. Going downhill, one should stay back in the saddle and balance the body. After we climbed up a ridge, the horizon started to show the sun's glow. Ahead was a wide Steppe, but in front of us was a long line of barbed wire. The gate in the middle was locked. By the yurt a dozen metres away, a black dog was barking at us, showing his white fangs. At each of our steps forward, he pounced at us but was dragged back by the leash.

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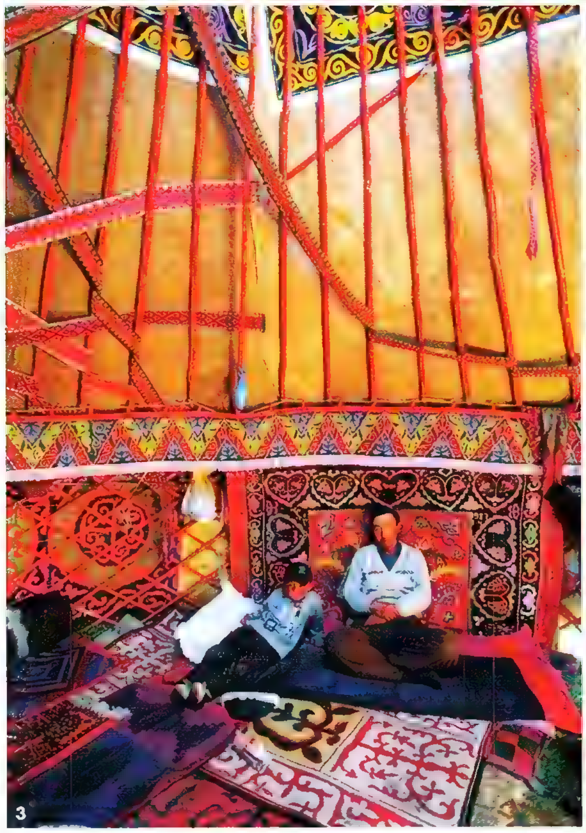

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Then the wooden door of the yurt opened. An old Kazak man with a hat walked out, looking at us curiously. Halei spoke in Kazak, saying would enter the Steppe and go on to Kanas. The old man went inside to get the key. I asked Halei, 'Why do people circle the Steppe with barbed wire?' He said, 'In summer the nomads are grazing the herds on the summer pastures on the high mountains. This is a pasture reserved for the winter.' The old man unlocked the gate. As I did not know the Kazak language, I bowed to him to express my gratitude. He pressed his hand on his chest respectfully, wishing us a safe journey. Such a speechless exchange was better than any spoken words. I felt touched somehow. Going into the waist-high grass, the horses clomped over the dew on the grass and exposed its green colour. The air smelled of the light fragrance of grass. The trail was covered by the grass and difficult to see. The dew wet the horse's belly and my shoes. Climbing uphill, the horses started to slow down and gasp. They snorted once in a while. They sweated heavily and shook the drops off. The horses were heating up and emitting a strong odour. At a creek strewn with moulded pebble stones, my horse stopped to drink. Halei heard the sound of a horse drinking and reined in his horse, shouting, 'No drinking! Let's go!' He was anxious. He was right as it would have loose bowels when he was sweating and drank cold water. For the health of it, I tightened the rein to resume the walk. I felt sorry for the creature.

## Shearing Once a Year

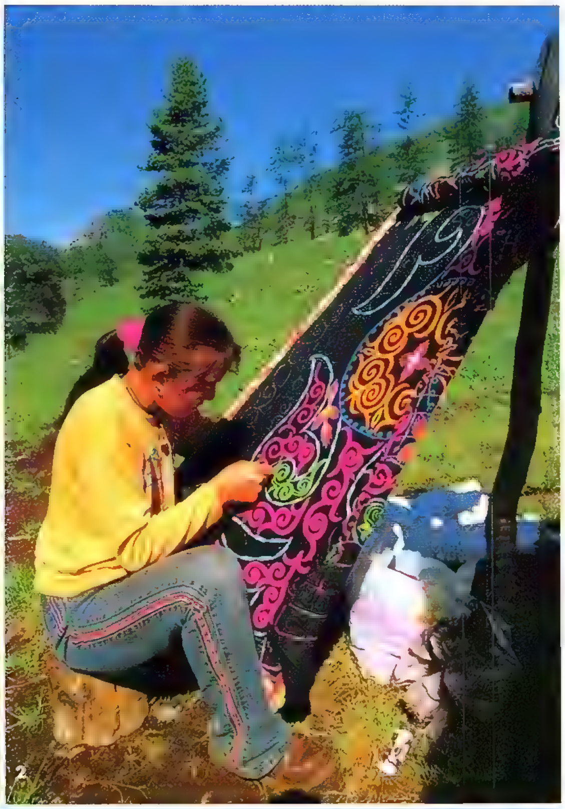
On a high mountain pasture, we arrived at the yurt of a Kazak family, with the mother and daughter sitting there. The daughter was embroidering quietly, one stitch after another. She used a red wool yarn to make a bold pattern. The mother by her side said that her daughter was preparing her dowry. The girl

1. Fleece is a high-class textile. It is an essential part of the income of the nomads.

2. Kazak embroidery is rarely seen. It looks coarse, compared with the Suzhou embroidery in Jiangnan areas south to the Yangtze River.

3. As the bottom of the lake has a thick sediment of black rock powder, the lake surface looks black — hence the name the Black Lake.

blushed at hearing the conversation, and looked aside. I asked, where is the bridegroom? She pouted her lips, and said, there. I looked in the direction she pointed and saw two Kazak men busy working in the stone-stacked sheepfold by a stone hut. The older man was the father of the girl and the younger one was her fiancé. The young man was brawny. He deftly dragged a stubborn buck down. The old man tied it up quickly with ropes. They worked well together. The young man held a pair of scissors of over 30 cm long and sheared the fleece from the belly up, layer by layer. The fleece cut off was thick and soon formed a small pile. Done with the buck, the young man stuffed a helminthagogue pill into its mouth. The pill would get rid of the nematode, trematode and cestode in its body. He released it and the animal flipped up. The buck was now snow-white and seemed much smaller in size. Usually shearing is done in spring and autumn on grassland. However, the temperature of the Altay is cold, so shearing is done once a year in the summer.



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At noon, we reached the Black Lake. Nearly a thousand marsh lakes are scattered throughout the area. It is also called 'Thousand Lakes'. The lakes are in fact quite small. The largest one, the Black Lake, is just 1 sq. km. The waters of the lake are connected with the surrounding wetland. I guessed that the area had a large lake in the past. Due to global warming, the lake was gradually reduced into a small lake and marshes.

## Dog as a Family Member

A white yurt was erected by the lakeside, with cattle, sheep, horses and camels grazing nearby. 'Let's have lunch here,' Halei said, dismounting. He released the belt under his horse's belly, and let him feed on the pasture. Getting off the saddle, I ached all over my body. I did not expect horse riding to be so tiresome. Stretching the limbs slowly and bending the waist, I followed Halei into the felt yurt. It housed a family of three. The couple were in their thirties, and the boy was about five or six. The hostess started to boil water and prepare tea once she saw us. The host came over and chatted. Halei talked about the weather, the weight of the cattle and sheep and the pasture.

In 15 minutes, the water on the cow dung stove was boiling. The hostess served milk tea. I prepared instant noodles with hot water. When I was about to eat the noodles, the boy by my side stared at me and started to cry. I gave him the noodles. He held the bowl and began eating. His father, who looked simple and straightforward, felt embarrassed. He rose and ran out of the yurt. He killed a lamb and cooked boiled mutton for us. When the hostess served the boiled mutton, the boy carried a bottle of clean water for us to wash our hands. He was really cute. We drank, ate mutton and chatted. I sensed that they did not speak much and might give an impression of being indifferent. They lived in a relatively closed and independent environment. They cultivated a strong sense of self-reliance. I thought that was why they were reserved. After lunch, I took out my camera and proposed a group picture. The host said, wait. He called in the dog to join the group picture. The nomads considered their dog one of the family. Before we left, I asked for a mailing address to send

Picture on the left: Kanas, meaning mysterious and beautiful in Mongolian, is an endowment from the heavens. The snow-capped mountain in the remote distance is Friendship Peak, the highest peak of the Altay. (by Li Xueliang)

Picture on the right: I visited a Tuvan called E'erdeshi, and listened to the music of the unique Tuvan musical instrument, Su'er.

them the picture. The couple looked at each other and did not know what to say. On second thoughts, I knew that they would not have such an address as they were nomadic people. It would be a tough job for the mailman to pass the mail to them.

## The Horse Knew the Way Home

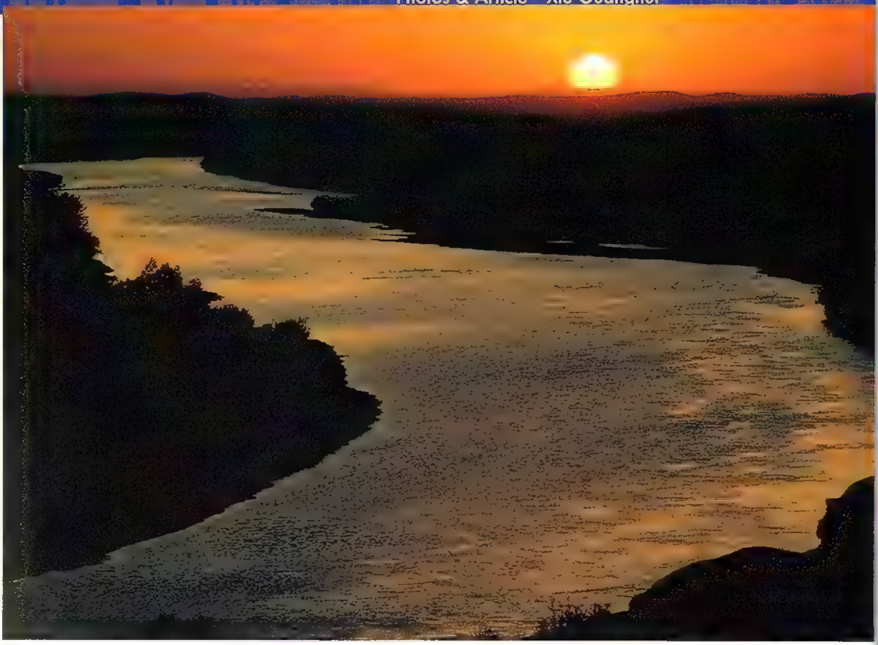
Halei was drunk. Like a drunken driver, he was a drunken horse rider. I was worried about him. Would he fall off? Would we get lost? Soon I knew my worries were unnecessary. The horse can understand his master and is the friend of human beings. The creature has a relatively high intelligence and will not misbehave with his master on his back. When we passed by the wetland by the lake, the horse was so smart that he could judge the best way to go. In a place with water there must be mosquitoes. The horse swayed his tail to drive them away. The horses knew that they were almost home and started trotting. We sat steadily on the saddle. I released the stiff-bit, allowing my horse to control the strength, speed and direction. The saying goes, 'an old horse knows the way,' is correct. I dismounted from my horse, and returned the reins to Halei. Home, sweet home! I patted him on the shoulder. He smiled and said, the bus service inside the scenic zone was free. He accompanied me to the nearest stop. I took a bus to Jiadengyu, waving good-bye to Halei. I was reluctant to leave, but I did not know whether it was because of Halei or the horse.

When I took a seat, I found many passengers staring at me. With a hand cupped over her nose, a tourist nearby asked whether I had came here on horseback. I nodded and smiled. She was interested in my trip and kept asking questions. I thought that she could not stand the horse sweat odour on my body as she kept cupping her hand over her nose. I lost interest in further conversation.

*Translated by Zhang Boli*

# Travel Tips for the Irtysh River and Kanas Lake

Photos & Article · Xie Guanghui



Sunset on the Irtysh River. (by Fan Shucai)

## Scenic Spots along the Irtysh River

### Kanas Lake

Kanas has two meanings in Mongolian 'a beautiful and mysterious place', and 'a lake in the valley'. Kanas River rises in the glaciers on the southern slope of the Altay Mountains' Friendship Peak. It passes by Kanas Lake and winds its way through the string of valleys below the Altay Mountains. It converges with Hemu River at Jiadengyu to form Burqin River. At 125 km long, Burqin River is the largest tributary of the Irtysh River.

Jiadengyu is the main gate of the Kanas Scenic Zone and the residential area. To reduce pollution in the lake area, since 2005, tourists have had to stay overnight in Jiadengyu. The scenic zone reveals a landscape of glaciers, snow-covered mountains, rivers, lakes, forests and grassland. Famous scenic spots include Crouching Dragon Bay, Moon Bay, Immortal Bay, Fish Viewing Kiosk, Kanas Lake and Tuvan Village. Rafting on the Kanas River is popular. The tourist season of the Scenic Zone is from June to October. Late August is the best time for sightseeing.

Taking a bus from Jiadengyu and heading along the circling mountain road, one stops first at Crouching Dragon Bay. At the bottom of the valley is a slow-flowing river. In the middle of the river is a shoal with lush plants. It looks like a crouching dragon playing in water, hence the name of the bay. Going upstream from Crouching Dragon Bay for a kilometre, one arrives at Moon Bay. The Kanas River cut a beautiful curve as if the crescent moon is falling into the densely forested valley.

Located on top of Halakaite ('hump peak' in Mongolian), Fish Viewing Kiosk, 2,030 m above sea level, covers a vertical distance of more than 600 m over the lake surface. The kiosk is named because it is said to be the best place to view the legendary 'Kanas Lake Monster' . Expeditionary experts conjectured that the monster was the Hucho taimen, a predatory species of two to three metres in length and weighing a few hundred kilos that lives in deep, cold waters. For the Tuvans, the 'monster' is much bigger and can swallow a cow. However, nobody really knows exactly what it looks like. In the past, the Tuvans made a few failed attempts to catch the 'monster'. After that, the Tuvans stayed away from it. They do not go fishing in the lake; nor do they graze livestock by the lakeside.

There are two ways to get to Fish Viewing Kiosk. One is to take a 4WD from the back of the mountain and stop halfway up the mountain. After that, one needs to climb on foot. The other is to climb the rock trail along a mountain creek for over 1,000 steps. It takes over one hour. This way is more physically demanding, but it is worthwhile. Standing on Fish Viewing Kiosk, one can command views of three fourths of the Kanas. Nowhere else is better than this spot. The deepest part of the Kanas is 184 m. The colour of the lake surface varies with the changes of season, weather and angle. When the water is clear, the lake looks blue. When melting water from the glaciers runs into the lake, it reveals a greenish colour. At dusk, in the shadow of light clouds, it is pink. On gloomy days it presents a vast expanse of bluish-grey water. Some people call it Colour Changing Lake. Looking southward along the Kanas River, one can see Immortal Bay and just make out Crouching Dragon Bay. Looking into the distance to the north, one can see Friendship Peak, the summit of the Altay Mountains. It is a natural meeting point for China, Russia and Mongolia. With an altitude of 4,374 m above sea level, Friendship Peak is not that high. Climbing to the top is not tough. In 2000, a party of climbers set off from the Kanas and made it to the summit. They were the first team in the world to climb Friendship Peak successfully.

Moon Bay. (by Fan Shucai)

▶ Tickets to the Kanas Scenic Zone: 130 yuan per person. Shuttle fare from Jiadengyu to the scenic zone: 80 yuan per person. Round-trip fare to Fish Viewing Kiosk: 40 yuan per person. Cruising on the lake (to Sandao Bay): 100 yuan per person. Rafting: 200 yuan per person. Lodging in the scenic spot: 250 to 300 yuan. Ticket from the scenic spot to Baihaba: 150 yuan per person (60 km round trip and a stay of two hours or so). Ticket to Baihaba: 60 yuan per person.

### Fuyun Geology Exhibition Hall and Mine III

Located 50 km to the north of Fuyun County, Karatünggü Town is known for Mine III, the largest rare metal mine in the world. Currently 130 m below ground, the mining pit contains 76 mineral substances, largely rare metals and radio-elements. Karatünggü's Geology Exhibition Hall has two rare treasures. One is a piece of ertixiite, a new mineral discovered in 1982. It is a white, translucent natural crystal. Though it is only 5 g, it is unique in the world. The other is a 1. 6 kg piece of tantalite-columbite-manganic ore. An American mineralogical expert once offered USD 400,000 for it. No photo taking is allowed in the Geology Exhibition Hall.

▶ Tip: The Geology Exhibition Hall will have little attraction for general tourists. However, if you are interested in geology and history, an excursion to Fuyun

Shuiwan Station, Nanwan, Lower course of the Irtysh River.

River-rafting in Kanas.

Geology Exhibition Hall is a must. Transport: Take a bus to Fuyun from the Ürümqi Bus Terminal, and then take a mini-bus to Karatünggü Town. Accommodation: Karatünggü Zhongshan Tourist Resort Address: Tuanjie Road West, Karatünggü, Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region Tel.: (906) 878 1688

### ▣ Wucaitan (Five-Colour Shoal) in Burqin

The Irtysh River is located 24 km northwest of Burqin County. On the south bank is an oasis and a stretch of desert. On the north bank is the cliff-like Yadan landform. The undulating highland reveals an assortment of changing colours. At dusk, the rocks take on a tonal red, mixed with streaks of green, yellow, white, black — continuous colour. The place where the river flows through the highlands is known as the most beautiful yadan (cliff) landform in Xinjiang.

It is best to avoid a noontime trip to Wucaitan. In the scorching sun there will be no shelter. The colours of the yadan landforms are not properly reflected at noon. The best time of the day to see the spectacle is at sunset. There will be no concerns about sun burn, and the scenery is most striking at that time of day.

▶ Tickets: 50 yuan. Transport: Take a bus to Burqin from the Ürümqi Bus Terminal, and then take a taxi. A good way to see the sunset at Wucaitan is to rent a car (normally 60 yuan). Accommodation: There are many hotels and guesthouses in Burqin. In low tourist season the room rate ranges from 100 to 200 yuan. In high season, demand is also high and the rate will rise.

### ▣ The Night Market Food Stalls of Burqin

The night market food stalls are near the pier at Burqin. This is a great spot for a feast of barbequed fish and meat with beer and kvass, a home-brewed beer. However, those who have stomach and digestion problems should be careful. Kvass is made of ground wheat and hops, mixed with honey, white sugar and boiled water. It takes two or three days to brew. It is popular among adults and kids. The cold-water fish on sale at the market is from the Burqin River and tastes great.

Kanas grassland

Karatünggü (by Chen [illegible])

### ▣ Hemu

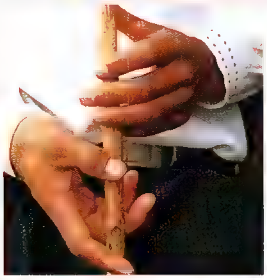
Hemu is known as the northernmost village in Western China. The houses in the village are constructed with logs laid one over another, with a pointed, tilted roof to cope with the rain and snow. Pine leaves line the four sides of the houses for a warm and damp-proof interior. The whole architectural construction is free of any decoration so the houses blend in with the natural surroundings. There are three ways to get to Hemu. One is to take a mini-bus from Burqin. After passing Chonghu'er Village in Jiadengyu, one takes to the mountain road to Kanas Lake. Fourteen km along there will be a branch road that leads to Hemu. One passes a toll gate before he can enter the village. A second way is to go from Jiadengyu along the Hemu River to the village. The whole journey is about 35 km. The third is to go from Kanas Lake to Hemu. The last two roads were in fact trails for walking and horse riding. They are typical trekking routes to experience the Kanas and the local ethnic culture. It is best to hire a guide. I recommend the horseback trek from Hemu to the Kanas as it is easier to find horses at Hemu. Normally one needs to walk for two days, and stay overnight at Black Lake. Tents, sleeping bags and two days of rations are required. If one goes on horseback and sets off in the early morning, he can arrive at Kanas Lake at dusk. A horse can be rented at 150 yuan per day. For the horses rented in Hemu, one needs to pay an extra 150 yuan for the return trip. For the horses from the Kanas, the return trip fee is saved.

▶ Ticket for Hemu: 60 yuan.

Beitun is where the Agriculture Army 10 of the Xinjiang construction troops is stationed, while Beiwan is the headquarters of Brigade 185 of the Agriculture Army. Both units belong to the Xinjiang construction troops. Their quarters are not recommended for general tourists. There are buses to Beitun and Beiwan from the local bus station.

▶ Transport: Tourists from Hong Kong can take a chartered plane, or take a plane from Shenzhen or Guangzhou, to Ürümqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. There are direct flights or trains to Ürümqi from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Kunming, Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Hangzhou, Fuzhou, Harbin, Dalian, Lanzhou, and Dunhuang.

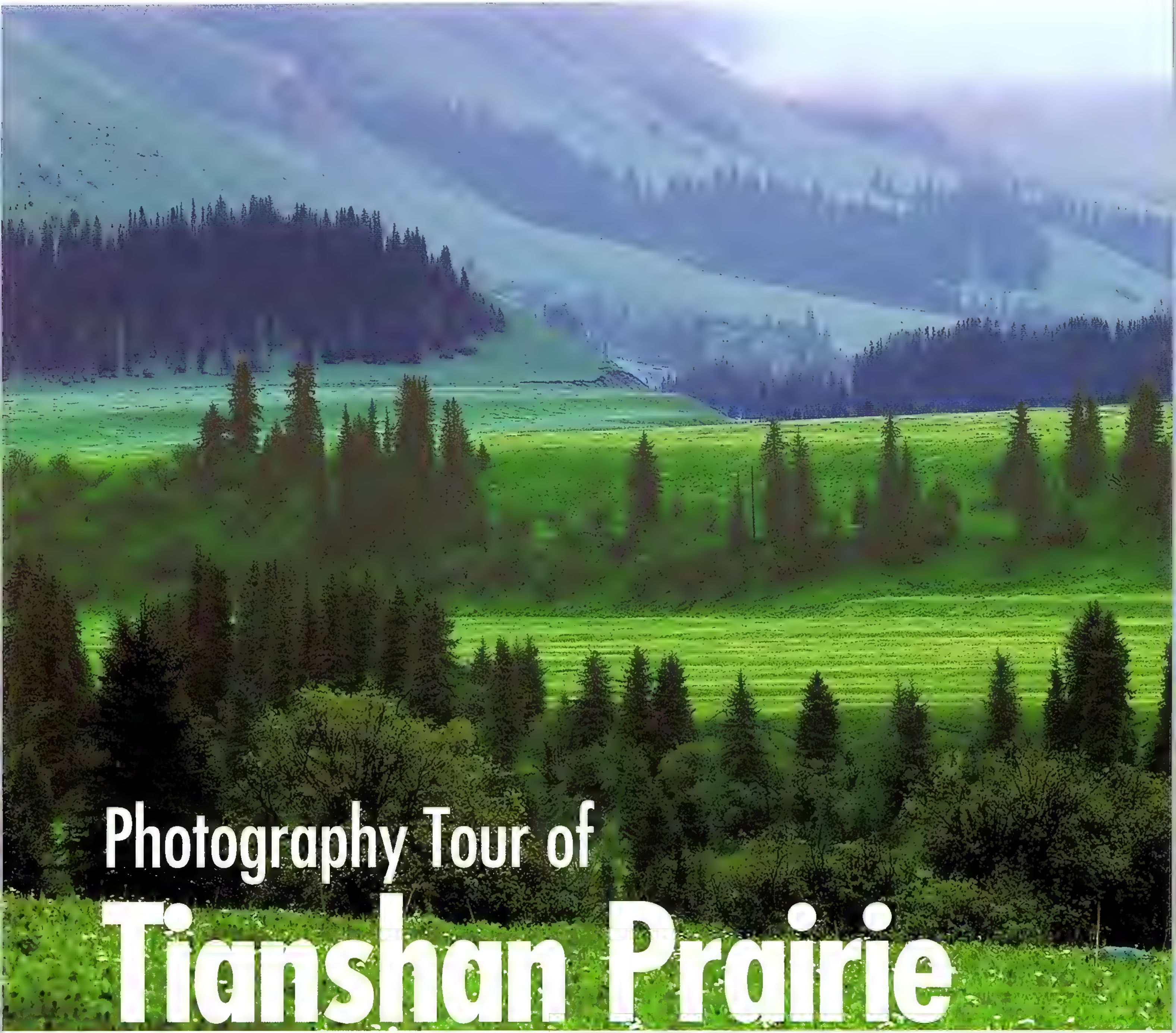
There are tourist buses to Kanas Scenic Zone in Ürümqi every day (about 14 hours). One can also take long-distance sleeper buses to Burqin in the bus terminal of Ürümqi that sets off at dusk and arrives in the early morning of the next day. At Burqin one can take a shuttle car to Kanas Lake or a bus to Hemu, where one can ride on horseback to Kanas.



### Su'er, a Tuvan Musical Instrument

Su'er is a unique flute-like Tuvan musical instrument. Extremely lightweight, it is made from part of a reed. About 50 cm long, with three holes, it can create desolate and mysterious sounds. In the past, the Tuvans played the su'er at weddings and on festive days. It was said that a music professor from Beijing heard a performance of the su'er and concluded the music performed was *Eighteen Passages of Huja Music*, the famous ancient lute music. If his conclusion was correct, the Tuvan music is a living fossil of the ancient Chinese music.

Currently only an old man called Erdeshi can both make and play the su'er. He lives in the Tuvan Village on the south bank of the Kanas Lake. Su'er-making was passed down generation to generation in the E'erdeshi family. Others do not know the trade. A lot of tourists who visit the Kanas pay the old man to play the su'er. Now E'erdeshi is teaching his son to both make and play the unique musical instrument.



# Photography Tour of Tianshan Prairie

**Xinjiang often conjures up images of the vast Gobi Desert, with only a sea of yellow sand — the rare little green patch only marks a little oasis. Actually, this region — which makes up about one sixth of China's entire land mass, contains other exciting topographical features as well, such as meadows deep in the Tianshan ranges, rivers, lakes and canyons.**

Photographs and article • Huang Songhui

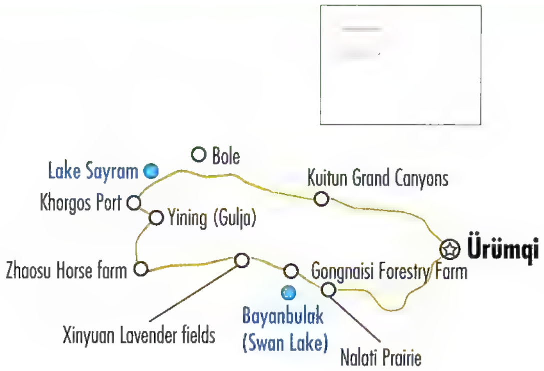
## Nalati Prairie

Nalati, part of the Gongnaisi grasslands, is known as Yili's most beautiful prairie. Nalati means 'hill facing the sun' in Mongolian, the best time to visit is spring (Xinjiang's spring and summer melt into one another and take place around June to August). At this time of the year Nalati makes you forget you're in the northwest of China. The lush colours and warm climate make it feel more like the south.

by Zhao Chengan

### Itinerary

- **D1** Ürümqi to Kuitun, shoot sights along the way and at Kuitun Canyons
- **D2** Gongnaisi to Lake Sayram, visit Aibi Lake on the way, overnight at Lake Sayram
- **D3** Shoot at Lake Sayram, then tour the Khorgos Port and photograph the market
- **D4** Khorgos to Zhaosu, photograph the grasslands and horse farm, overnight in Zhaosu
- **D5** Zhaosu to Xinyuan, visit the Eight-Diagram City of Tekes on the way, see sights like the Gongliu grasslands, Kezilaxia waterfall, Diaoyutai, stay at Nalati
- **D6** Nalati to Bayanbulak, photograph the Swan Lake, the Nine turns and 18 bends of Kaidu River, stay overnight at Bayanbulak
- **D7** Bayanbulak to Shihezi, photograph Guanyin mountain on the way
- **D8** Shihezi to Ürümqi


Bole
Lake Sayram
Kuitun Grand Canyons
Khorgos Port
Yining (Gulja)
Ürümqi
Zhaosu Horse farm
Gongnaisi Forestry Farm
Bayanbulak
(Swan Lake)
Xinyuan Lavender fields
Nalati Prairie

## Kuitun Canyons

The dramatic Kuitun Canyons emerging from the flatground — the scene is simply breathtaking. Their vast scale and grandeur would put the world's finest sculptors to shame. Standing at the edge of the canyon is like being atop a treacherous cliff, the river valley is 100 metres straight down — it's truly a miracle of nature! Try to take photos of the canyon before noon, because the river valleys are so deep that only morning or midday rays will shine onto the rock face.

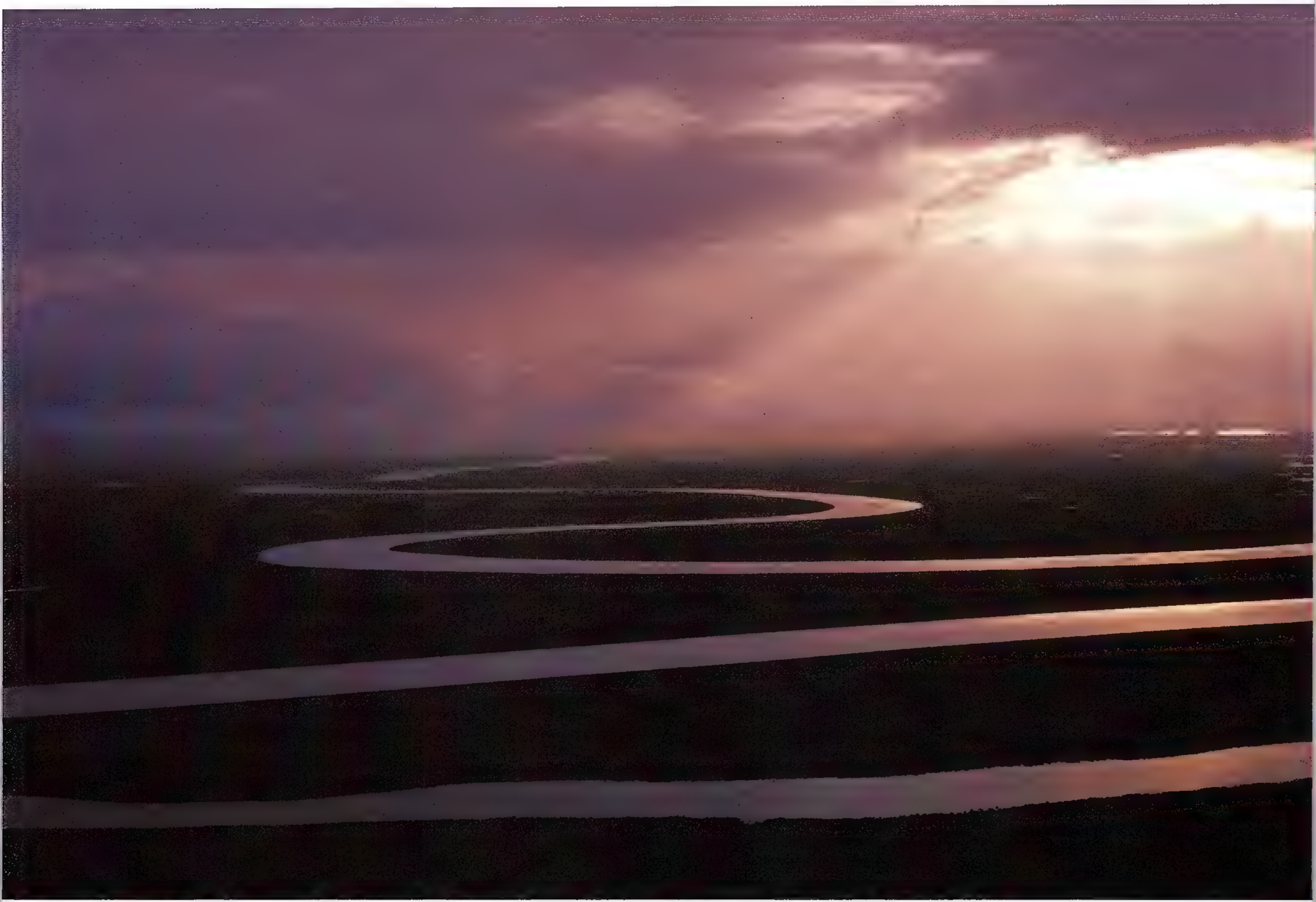
## Xinyuan lavender

Coming from Zhaosu, one can see all the colourful wild flowers and golden fields of rapeseed flowers. But don't miss the lavender in Xinyuan county, they are even more breathtaking! The vast open landscape painted with splashes of lavender is simply an impressionist painting. When we arrived, workers were harvesting the lavender in the hot sun; we could smell the flowers' soft fragrance floating in the wind.

## Lake Sayram

Located at the western tip of north Tianshan, Lake Sayram has been around for millions of years, it is nestled at the foot of Mount Kusongmuqieke and Mount Keguqin. Comprising 39 alpine creeks and springs, the lake — Xinjiang's largest alpine lake takes up 1,408 square kilometres, with a maximum depth of 86 metres. Lake Sayram is spectacular all year round, the shimmering glow of turquoise waters reflecting the mountains, as if a brilliant sapphire is set in the Tianshan ranges.

Shooting good photos by the lake takes not just a good eye and technical expertise, but luck too. May to July is the best season for photography, the lake water is blue, the sky is clear and dotted with fluffy clouds, wild flowers are in full bloom and there is abundant greenery. But this season is also known for its volatility — Lake Sayram can be suddenly rainy and windy, clouds would appear rapidly. Be patient, though, for sometimes the best opportunities reveal themselves after a bout of wild weather.



## Bayanbulak

Bayanbulak is a tourist hotspot because it is home to Swan Lake — Bayanbulak means 'the Spring of Gods' in Mongolian. Climb the mountain for a panoramic view and one can see the 'nine turns and eighteen bends' snaking towards you. But if you really want to see the fabled swans, you need to go to the Swan Farms which is around 100 kilometres away.

## Zhaosu Horse farm

Zhaosu is a basin surrounded by Zhongtian Mountain and Wusu Mountain, with an altitude of 1500-1900 metres. It enjoys a temperate, yet humid, climate. With fertile land and abundant feed for their horses, no wonder the herders see it as paradise. Tianma — heavenly horses once praised by the Han Wudi Emperor (156 —87 B.C.) as being 'superior to Kunlun, from the remote west' originated from here. Thus Zhaosu is also known as the birthplace of Tianma horses.

If you visit Zhaosu in June or July, you'll be treated to the spectacle of endless rapeseed flower fields. Don't miss the sunsets at Zhaosu, one will be impressed by the candy-floss coloured sky, with sunset golden rays lingering over the grassy knolls.

*Translated by Cheng Lei*

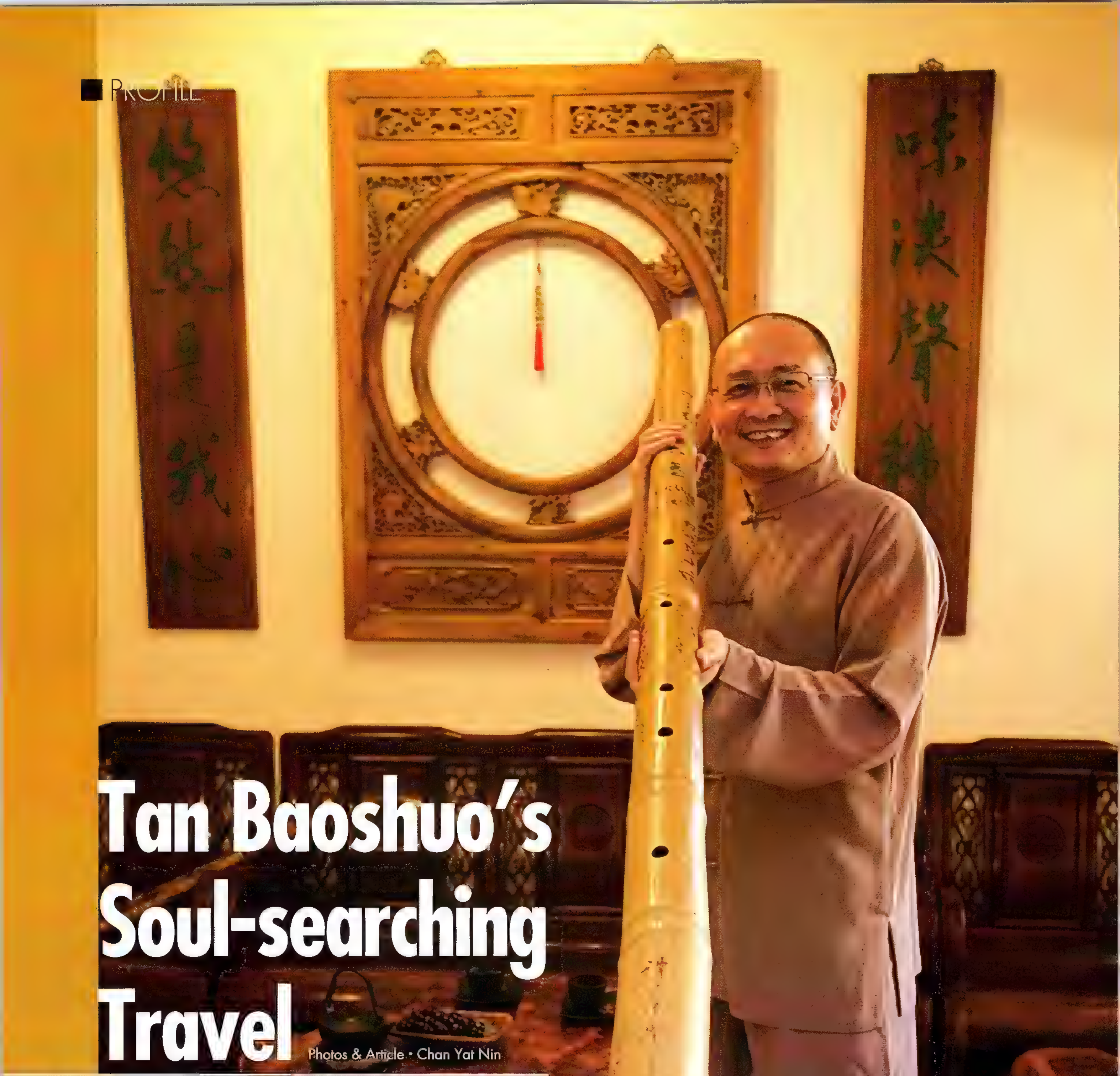
**Clothing** Xinjiang has large climate differences; sometimes you can experience four seasons in one day, for example — down jackets in the morning and evening, short sleeves at noon. It could even snow at night, so make sure you bring a variety of clothing — both long and short-sleeved (anti-UV materials are best).

**Food** Local snacks abound in Xinjiang's Yili region — try delicacies like lamb rice, blood sausage, smoked horse meat, lamb skewers.

**Accommodation** There are hotels and inns along the way; double rooms cost 100 ~ 150 yuan, Mongolian round yurts cost 50 yuan / person

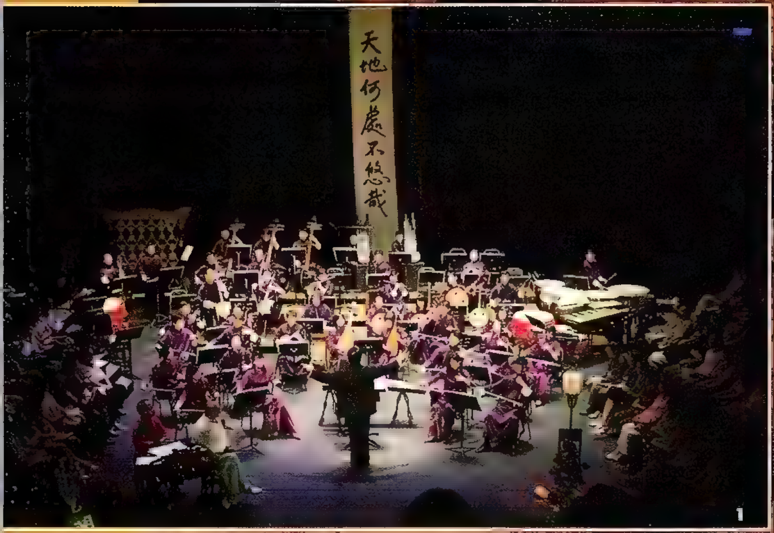
**Transport** By air: Shenzhen to Ürümqi 1,800 ~ 2,600 yuan, Ürümqi to Yining (Yili prefecture's capital) 340 ~ 680 yuan

Car hire: Toyota, Mitsubishi SUVs cost 800 ~ 900 yuan / day excluding tolls and petrol, taxis cost 500 ~ 600 yuan / day



# Tan Baoshuo's Soul-searching Travel

Photos & Article • Chan Yat Nin



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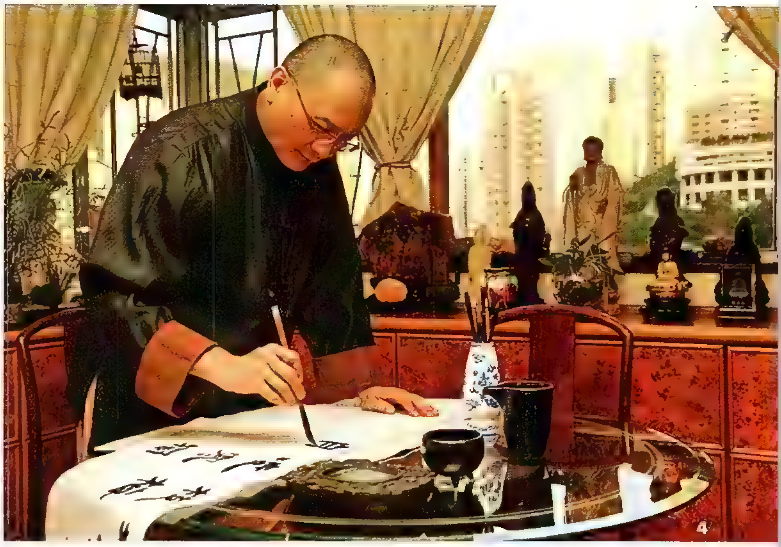

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In June, the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra held a unique concert with the theme 'Music for Tranquillity of the Mind' at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre theatre. This music performance filled the entire theatre with an appreciative audience.

At the concert, the famous bamboo flutist Tan Baoshuo didn't play any music. Instead, as the host, he led the audience into the artistic world with his words, which were as attractive as one of his superb performances. Interestingly, he sat with the principal and general director of the Orchestra, Yan Huichang, and the musical therapist Zhao Guoliang around a tea table to one side of the orchestra, drinking tea, appreciating music and chatting. Before each piece commenced, Tan Baoshuo introduced its background, or quoted poems to describe the artistic conception and feeling of the music; at other times he recalled his travel experiences in the desert in northern China and waterside villages in southern China.

During a sentimental moment, he unfurled a long white scroll and wrote one sentence with a big writing brush, 'Leisure exists everywhere'. Then he hung the scroll up, as a background for the orchestra.

When I saw this, I couldn't help thinking of the vagaries of life.

## Jack-of-All-Trades

I have known Tan since childhood. He'd been interested in playing flutes and making flutes from a young age. As we grew up, our lives diverged and we rarely saw each other. Not until a few years ago when I started to attend his shows were we reunited. Today, he has become an expert in many fields, and certainly quite famous.

First, he is a master flutist, composer, host, narrator and sometimes a drum player for the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra; he devotes himself to the promotion of Chinese music. He teaches students and records music CDs, and is quite capable in multi-media performances that combine traditional Chinese music with modern technology.

Second, he is a famous flute maker, who is also dedicated to the reform and innovation of flute-making. In 1987, he invented the low-pitch and fixed-pitch flutes. These flutes are unique and were once displayed in the Hong Kong City Hall and the Central Library; now they remain at the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Third, he is a skilled calligrapher and painter. His calligraphy and Chinese ink painting can be seen on the promotional pamphlet, the programme and his orchestra's environmentally friendly bags.

Fourth, his Buddhism beliefs enable him to appreciate the philosophy of life and to keep himself open-minded.

Lastly, he is a travel enthusiast. Travel not only enriches his knowledge but also brings him inspiration for his music creations.

I share the same interest in travel.

## Travel is the 'Catalyst' of Artistic Inspiration

Tan's travels can be roughly categorized into two categories.

One is 'passive travel'. Every year he goes to other cities to perform with his orchestra. He uses these opportunities to do some sightseeing, which benefits him a lot though usually he can only spare half a day or a day for it. As an envoy for art exchange, he is exposed to and learns from diverse cultures, thus broadening his views through travel.

The other is 'active travel' which is a less restrained 'soul-searching travel' with a clear goal. As a musician, he finds himself easily inspired when travelling. When visiting the Silk Road in northwest China, he thought of the

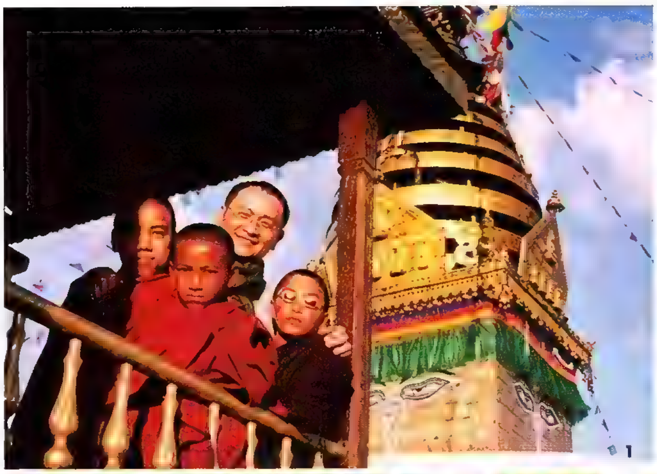
1. **At the concert 'Music for Tranquillity of the Mind', Tan wrote one sentence with a big writing brush on the spot, 'Leisure exists everywhere'. This sentence shows the artistic concept of the concert.**

2. **This flute made by Tan is the longest bamboo flute in the history of music. Its unique sound is both pure and deep.**

3. **Tan and a *guqin* musician, Xie Junren, performing together at a traditional music gathering in March of this year.**

4. **Tan writes calligraphy not only for practice but also to cultivate his mind.**

5. **Carved with Buddha's images, Buddhist scriptures, and Buddhist chants and poems, these flutes made by Tan are popular with a lot of people.**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traditional Chinese *guqin* music *The Moon over Mount Guanshan*; when visiting the Slender West Lake in Yangzhou, he recalled Tang dynasty poems; while visiting the Maple Bridge and the Hanshan Temple in Suzhou, the music of *Night Mooring at the Autumn River* echoed in his mind. All of these tours play a role as catalyst in Tan's achievements in arts. At his multi-media concert, the theme, selection of music, explanation of music pieces, poems recited and slides explain very well the far-reaching impact that his extensive travel has had on his performances.

*The Night Song of the Ganges* is one outcome of Tan's soul-searching travel.

'It was in 1996 that I started to create *Night Song of the Ganges*. At that time, I had never even visited the Ganges River. I only heard about it from a friend who went there. So this music was created according to my friend's description and my imagination. In early 2003, I finally visited the Ganges River. Standing by the river, I saw people of different castes bathing or praying in the water. These people, rich and poor, all came to this sacred river with a devout heart.' Tan's own experience gave him a deeper understanding of the Ganges River. After he returned, he made some changes to his music. In May of the same year, he played *Night Song of the Ganges* for the first time at the Life of Buddhist Charm Concert of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (he was both host and performer at this concert). When he was performing, his pictures of the Ganges River were projected onto a screen so that the audience could appreciate the music more. Tan said that whenever he sees these pictures, he thinks of his experience of the Ganges River. As he said to the audience before the performance: life is actually simple and easy – as long as you are willing to strip yourself of all your worries and concerns, you can live a very happy life.

Tan's other piece *Night Rain at Yunmen* was

5

created after he visited the Yunmen Temple. The Yunmen Temple, nestled in the Yunmen Mountain in the Ruyuan Yao Autonomous Prefecture, north of Guangdong, is the birthplace of the Yunmen Sect, one of the five sects of Zen Buddhism.

## Making Flutes is like Conducting Oneself

Tan Baoshuo is very busy with his orchestra and meeting various media people. In his spare time, he makes flutes, writes calligraphy, paints, teaches, writes articles, takes and develops pictures, and sometimes organizes music-themed gatherings. He is very busy, isn't he? But when you talk to him, you'll feel he's so amiable, and never in a rush.

His flute playing is soothing, just like his personality. When Tan first started his music career, he played *di* (classical flute), then later mostly *xiao* (vertical bamboo flute). He was much more taken by the simplicity and vigour of the bamboo flute's sound, which he felt suited his personality better.

Actually, from the bamboo flutes made by Tan, we can also see his personality. He said: making a bamboo flute is like conducting oneself. It's important to be earnest and open-minded. Materials are the most important component for bamboo flutes. The places that produce bamboo flutes in China are generally the places where bamboo grows. So it's not hard to find materials to make bamboo flutes, but Tan has more strict requirements for the bamboo he uses. If he travels to a place which grows bamboo, he always spends a lot of time looking for the best bamboo, sometimes asking friends to search and buy it for him, and sometimes even digging it up himself. He likes the fine texture of the bamboo on Mount Wuyi in Fujian, which suits the sound vibrations of bamboo flutes, and its natural shape is perfect for traditional bamboo flutes. This bamboo can only be used after being dried for a few years. Whether the flute has a good sound or not can only be known after it has been tried out. However, sometimes as little as one wrong cut can destroy the flute, so one should be ready for that and not be afraid of failure.

The flutes made by Tan are delicately carved pieces of artwork and each is a collectible though they are not top-grade musical instruments. I saw a 2.21-m bamboo flute with an 8.5 cm diameter at his home. It is made of an entire stalk of a Hunan Moso bamboo. It took him six months to make this flute in 1994, and it is the longest bamboo flute in Chinese music history. This precious flute is carved with Buddhist scriptures, poems and calligraphy, as well as the signatures of scores of musicians. It was once used at the concert of *The All Powerful Flute.*

*Translated by Nichole Ouyang*

香港故事
譚寶碩 著
葉落天地間
空山
蕭中禪

7

1. Nepal's pure Buddhist customs are charming.

2. In 2002, Tan followed the Hong Kong Trade Development Council to promote Hong Kong and Chinese culture in Australia. He exchanged ideas with the local folk artists.

3. Tan had his picture taken at Mr. Sun Yat-sen's former residence in Malaysia when he attended the poem musical created by poet Li Yuebai.

4. Visiting the Wulingyuan Scenic Area in Hunan with his wife. (Photos 1-4 and 6 courtesy of Tan Baoshuo)

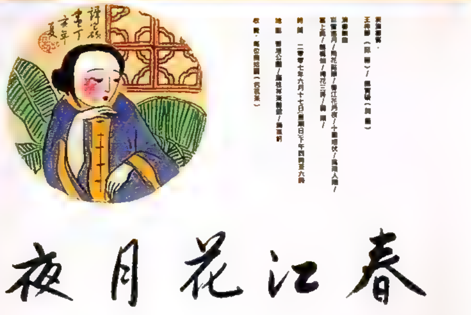
5. To make bamboo flutes is like conducting oneself. It's important to be careful and open-minded.

6. In July 2006, Tan went to a mountain in Hualien, Taiwan to dig up bamboo for making flutes.

7. Tan's works and his flute music albums.

8. The programme designed by Tan.

Tan hosts a music gathering entitled 'Bamboo Flutes and the Joy of Tea' in a tea house in the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens from four to six pm every Sunday. Each week has a different theme, as he and his string instrument players perform, drink tea and talk about life.



8

INTERCONTINENTAL

### InterContinental Shenzhen

# A Wonderful Hispanic Experience

Photos • Keith Article • Jackie

**Enjoyment-savvy Hong Kongers are always on the lookout for hotels with increasingly superior standards. A comfortable atmosphere, wide-ranging facilities, world-class food and beverages, and a full spectrum of professional services, all have become necessities. The InterContinental Shenzhen, opened for less than a year, is designed and built to a platinum five-star standard in China. Beside possessing all the above essential requirements, it has elevated its offerings to an even higher level by showcasing traditional Hispanic culture, thereby providing guests with an unique and exotic experience during their stay.**

Sun-drenched, relaxed and resplendent are words that not only describe Spain but also provide an accurate portrait of the InterContinental Shenzhen. Located on the previous site of the Shenzhen Bay Hotel, the InterContinental covers more than 60,000 sq m. As the first hotel in China conceived and styled with a Hispanic theme, it effectively balances both business and vacation functions and is conveniently located near the Window of the World, Happy Valley and Splendid China.

Driving up to the hotel, guests immediately will see a large replica galleon of the Santa Maria that Columbus sailed when he discovered the New World. This provides a perfect prelude to the Hispanic experience that is about to unfold. A footman in a traditional bullfighting costume will take hold of horn-shaped door handles, and open the large glass doors revealing a round reception hall decorated with an ox head-on-red motif. Waiters and waitresses in red and black Flamenco dance outfits, modern statues of Spanish bulls along the side galleries, red droplights in the main hall with black balustrades, Hispanic pastoralist paintings, sun-kissed yellow carpets, and porcelain tiles and marbel decorated gardens containing exquisite fountains and pools, etc. The entire hotel has been uniquely designed with colours, styles and lines all harmoniously matched and calculated to reveal Hispanic culture in all its richness. All in all, it is an unforgettable and breathtaking scene.

## Comfort from Rooms to Back Garden

The Hotel stands 8-floor high with sightseeing elevator available in each of its two wing-flanked

1. A beach of real sand is one of the outstanding features of the Hotel. The water is no deeper than 1.4 metres which best suits family outings.

2. Six large horse-riding paintings – each 6 metres high – are hung in Espana's major dining room.

3. Spacious, luxurious suites are all in harmonious colours and equipped with 'Bose' audio systems and LCD screen TV sets.

4. The indoor swimming pool remains at a constant temperature allowing one to swim anyway he or she likes in any season no matter whether it is cloudy or fine.

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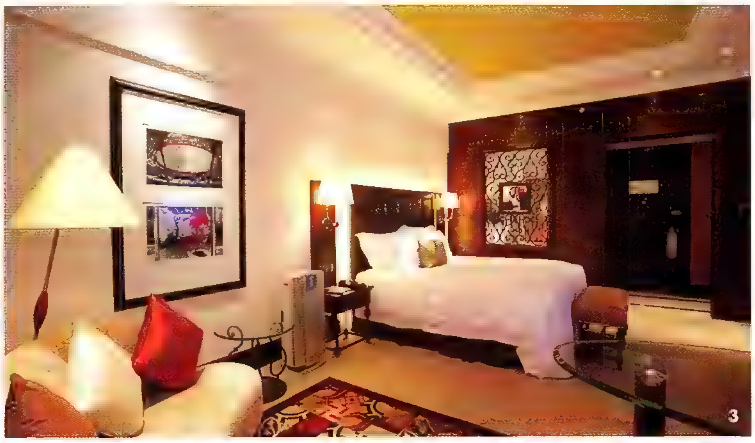
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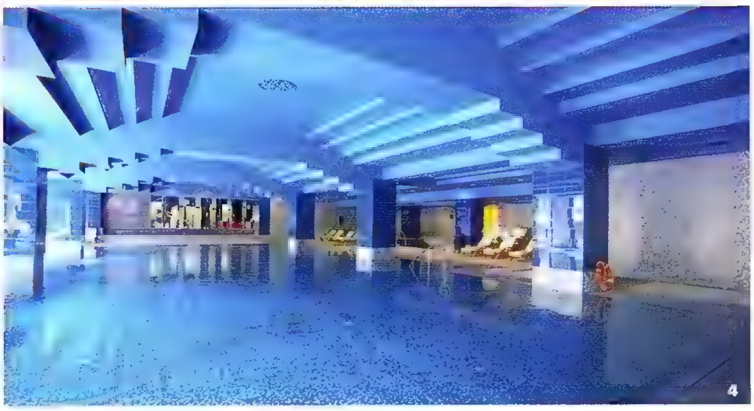
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buildings. Altogether there are 549 guest rooms, suites and service apartments, but what about that platinum five-star standard? All rooms come equipped with a broadband internet acces, a LCD screen TV set, the famous brand 'Bose' audio system, a king-size desk, spacious closet and a mini bar. The most wonderful thing is the bathrooms boast a large bathtub in the middle, which separates a state-of-the-art lavatory and a refreshing shower room on two sides.The 6th floor features the Intercontinental Club, where business guests can quickly finish registrations. The club's refreshment veranda offers drinks and snacks in variety. 24-hours a day Two meeting rooms each accommodating 4-8 people are available, as well as an outdoor leisure area with scenic springs. The duplex suites on the 7th floor are equipped with rooftop jacuzzi and barbecue sites. The Presidential suite on the top floor is priced at 58,000 yuan and up per evening. All furniture is Hispanic style, and the walls sparkle with copies of Picasso masterpieces. From the veranda one can savour a panoramic view of the hotel's splendid garden.

The hotel has created a stunning back garden composed of a swimming pool crafted with real sand, an islet, a children's playground and La Parrilla, a poolside restaurant, allowing guests to enjoy a Hispanic life-style at their leisure. The real-sand swimming pool is very large at 2,000 sq m. Guests can take an afternoon siesta in the shadow of the coconut palms, nibble on a pizza or swim freely in the pool.

As for business services, the astylar-style dining room Espana holds 1,200 guests and can be divided into two separate function rooms if needed. Distinctive features of the dining room are 6-foot tall life horse-riding paintings, a special slope-way designed for automotive exhibitions and state-of-the-art illumination system that produces unique visual effects. Additionally, a smaller dining room, Barcelona, and a 7-room multi-functional Madrid can satisfy the many, various needs of a business clientele. Believe it or not, there actually is also a Wedding Centre catering to wedding banquets. Brides and bridegrooms can spend their first wonderful moments together in its vaulted outdoor square and church.

## Fabulous Facility Makes Leisure Environment More Elegant

The InterContinental Shenzhen Hotel is characterized by its various food and beverage services and elegant dining environment. Mercado offers Hispanic and other fine food in a design concept derived from the quaint al fresco cafàms found throughout Spain. It occupies two floors and features expansive window placement to maximize natural lighting and impress guests with a feeling of spaciousness. Dining tables are inlaid with colourful Mediterranean porcelain tiles. Particularly alluring are

1. The vermeil Pegasus platform piano is a very expensive and a very rare artistic product.

2. Mercado occupies both the ground and the first floors with French windows providing a natural light that creates a feeling of broad space.

3. Alenha with its wooden log walls that create a back-to-nature ambiance is a restaurant that specializes in Brazilian barbecue.

4. The chocolate pudding and blue strawberry creams in Mercado are worthy of a try.

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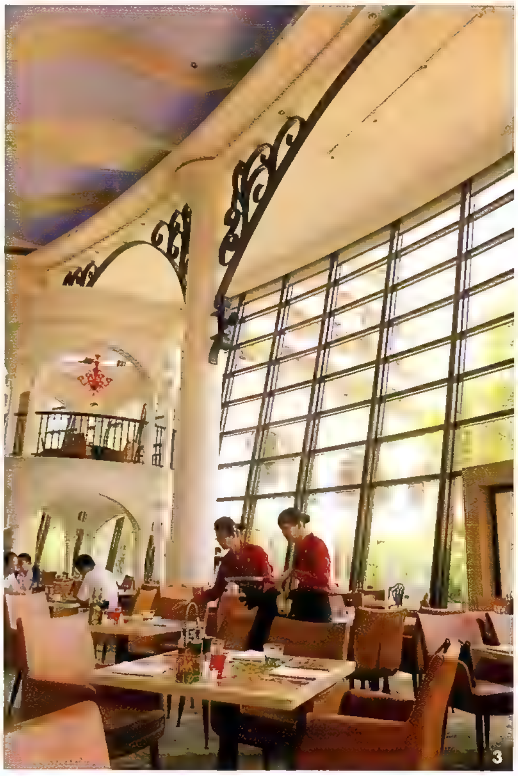

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its air-dried sausage and assorted meat fillets as well as its Spanish seafood risotto and sumptuous desserts. An authentic 'Molteni' cooking oven is used in this restaurant. Such ovens cost over a million yuan and are extremely rare in China. A Molteni oven is hand-made and completely customized to alternate temperatures automatically in its different compartments. It is both practical and beautiful, and it has built up the highest reputation in Europe.

In the Lounge 1982, cigars and a variety of liquors are on offer. It spotlights a 'Schimmel / Colani' pegasus-style platform piano. This is one of the only ten in the world and commands a price of 1.8 million yuan. The producer is the German company Schimmel, founded in 1885, and this precious instrument was created by Prof. Luigi Colani who also has designed the masterwork Ferrari sports car. Fashionable and beautiful in a vermeil streamlined shape, it is a rare artistic treasure. Every evening the piano is played by invited musicians, even Bill Wesley from America, would come to play favorite classical pieces occasionally.

## Plenty of Delicacies

For guests who love to savour fine wines, the especially large cellar collection in the French restaurant Pipette certainly will satisfy. This cellar occupies more than 2,000 sq m and stores over 10,000 vintages of rare wine and various types of liquor. Five special rooms for private gatherings are provided. It is a true pleasure to dine on excellent French cuisine with Sambonet tableware, to sip a bit of French Chateau Lafite 1982, and to appreciate the restaurant's rare Hispanic antique furniture.

*Translated by Huang Deyuan*

### How to start your Hispanic Trip

* Transport: Take the subway from Luohu Station to the Overseas Chinese Town Station (5 yuan fare) and reach the Hotel directly via the He Xiangning Art Museum exit. Alternatively one can take Bus No.90 at the Shenzhen Bay Port along the western passage (2 yuan fare), get off at the Window of the World's General Station, and walk straight ahead.

* Address: 9009 Shennan Road, Overseas Chinese Town, Shenzhen

* Accommodation Prices: Minimum 1,618 yuan for a luxury room, and 2,018 yuan for an executive room.

* Website: www.shenzhen.intercontinental.com

Lounge 1982
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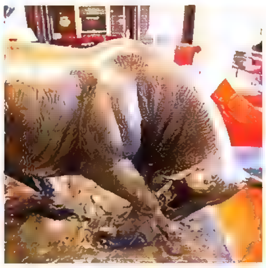


## Garden Hotel Suzhou re-opens with grace and style

The historic Garden Hotel Suzhou, a former State guesthouse and private residence of Kuomingtang leader Jiang Jieshi which has emerged from a 260 million-yuan makeover as a premier 5-star business hotel in the 'Venice of the East', is officially opened.

The luxurious property features 238-rooms with 93 Deluxe Rooms, an Executive Floor of 60 Executive Rooms with its own Executive Club Lounge serving coffee, tea and assorted snacks, a Presidential Suite and two Ambassador Suites. Comprehensive conference facilities, a modern business centre, luxurious spa, gym and a boutique are incorporated in the renovation.

The Garden Hotel Suzhou is just 45 minutes from Hongqiao Airport and a 15-minute drive from the train and bus stations.

## China Southern Announces New One Ticket Hainan Service

China Southern Airlines, the largest airline in China is extending its all-new one ticket service. Created specifically for the frequent business travellers, One Ticket Service gives passenger the ultimate flexibility in their flight plans.

Available now through 31 December 2007, One Ticket Service passengers can change their departure city or destination between Haikou and Sanya including Guangzhou / Shenzhen / Beijing / Shanghai as well as the date of travel at no charge.

## Improved Sightingseeing Bus Service in Shanghai

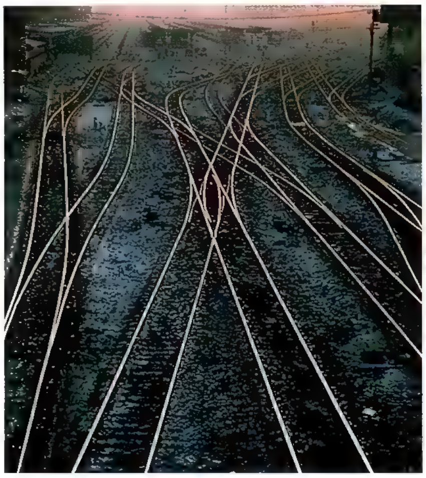
Starting this October, the free sightseeing bus service in Luwan District has improved greatly. The Luwan District Tourism Administrative Bureau has evaluated the low usage was due to long waiting periods and the sharing of stops with normal buses. They now add special bus stops with signs to catch tourists' attention. The frequency has also been increased to every 20 minutes. The route connects sites of historic significance, such as Fuxing Park, Xintiandi and Dr Sun Yat-sen's former residence. The more friendly service has marked better passenger number since then.

## Tibet to Build Miniature Potala Palace

Serving as the former residence of the Dalai Lamas, the Potala Palace is the top tourist attraction in Tibet. With the floods from the Qinghai-Tibet Railway the ancient building is over 1,300 years old and is feeling the strain.

According to the vice director of the Tibet Tourism Bureau, a miniature Potala Palace will be built to divert the tourist floods. With a help of high-tech sound and light, the replica will show a vivid and almost real Potala Palace to visitors. The mini-palace will be housed in a treasure exhibition hall at the foot of Red Hill, where the original Potala Palace is located.

Located in the northwestern corner of Lhasa, the Potala Palace was first built by the Tibetan King Songtsa Gambo in the seventh century during the Tang dynasty (618 – 907). It was extended during the 17th century by the Dalai Lama.



## Work Begins on Harbin-Dalian Passenger-only Rail Line

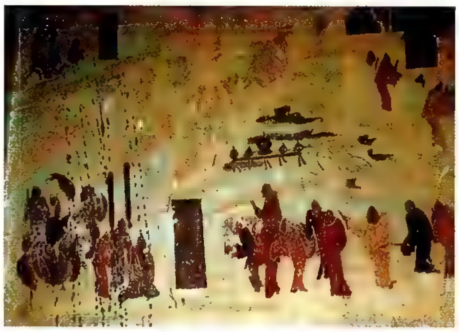
Construction of the 92.3-billion-yuan (US$12 billion) passenger-only railway line linking four major cities in Northeast China began in Changchun, capital of Jilin Province.

The railway stretches from Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, to Dalian in Liaoning Province via Changchun and Shenyang, capital of Liaoning Province and will have 23 stations. It will cut through major industrial clusters such as heavy chemicals in Harbin and Daqing, automobile in Changchun, equipment manufacturing in Shenyang, chemicals, ship-building and information technology in Dalian and steel in Anshan.

As a key project of China's mid-and-long-term rail construction plan, the railway is expected to transport 37 million passengers per year by 2020, and 51 million by 2030.

It will also support the development of two major harbors in the region – Dalian and Yingkou.

## Visitors to Mogao Grottoes Face Limits



The daily number of tourists permitted to visit the Mogao Grottoes will be limited next year in a bid to better protect the frescoes inside, according to the Dunhuang Academy.

Statistics provided by the academy show that 3,000 to 5,000 tourists visit the ancient relics every day during the annual May-October tourist season, surpassing the Mogao Grottoes' estimated daily capacity of 2,900 people. Both the caves and the frescoes inside would be better served by having fewer people passing through. The constant temperature inside the cave and dry weather outside has helped preserve the Mogao Grottoes. A simulation revealed that constant changes in the relative humidity inside the caves damaged the ancient frescos.

## Visits to Beijing Cultural Relics Restricted During Olympics

Beijing will restrict the number of daily visits to cultural relics during the Olympic Games 2008 in order to ensure orderly visits and protect cultural relics, according to the Beijing Cultural Heritage Administration.

All cultural relics in Beijing will undergo a thorough 'facelift' before next August, and any renovation, except for emergency repair, will be suspended during the Games. The 'facelift' includes exterior renovations of ancient constructions and roofs that are visible from adjacent streets. This will enable visitors, especially foreign tourists, to see Beijing through cultural relics.

A regulation on cultural relics management for the Olympics, which outlines measures for protection, renovation, creating obstacle-free facilities and regulations regarding filming, will go into effect on October 2007 and last one year.

## Shanghai reveals route of Metro Line 10

Shanghai Shentong Metro Group announced Shanghai's Metro Line 10 will traverse most of the city's signature areas including Sichuan Road, Huaihai Road and Yuyuan Garden. The group also signed a contract with a consortium composed of Alstom SA, Shanghai Alstom Transport Co and Nanjing Puzhen Vehicle Factory to import 41 six-carriage Metro trains for the line. The line will be open to the public by the end of 2009 and 26 new trains will arrive in the city before March 2010 to ensure there are enough trains to meet demand for the World Expo 2010. The 36-kilometer Metro Line 10 has 30 underground stations, stretching from the New Jiangwan Town in the north to Hongqiao Airport in the southwest.

## Roast Duck On The Road to list on exchange

Quanjude (Group) Co Ltd, a well-known chain of roast duck restaurants plans to sell up to 36 million shares once they get approval to list on the Shenzhen exchange. Quanjude is 48.4 percent-owned by the Beijing Tourism Group. Its brand was deemed one of China's 430 faniys brands by the Ministry of Commerce. If this public initial offering is approved, it will become the first listed catering company on the mainland. The company will use the funds raised to renovate two stores in prime locations in Beijing before the 2008 Olympic Games, as well as to expand the production capacity and fund the development of its franchised restaurants.

## Eight 5A Tourism Areas in Three Gorges

English Information O
The Three Gorges Project

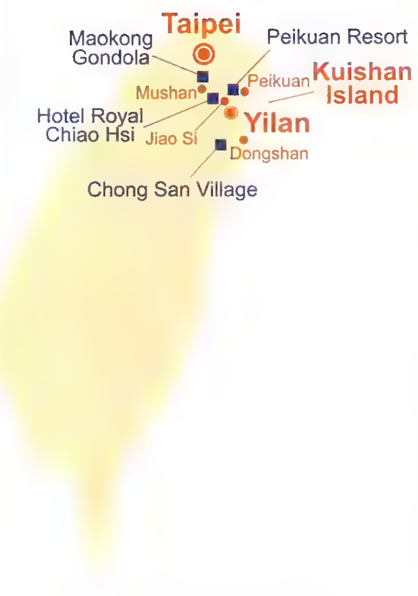
Within the next 13 years Hubei Province will invest 26.929 billion yuan (about US$3.58 billion) in approximately 40 tourism projects inside the Three Gorges Area. Authorities aim to establish this region as a recognized domestic and international tourist destination.

A team of experts approved the Development and Operation Plan for the Three Gorges Area International Destination in Hubei Province. The plan proposes construction of eight 5A tourism areas. They are called: the Three Gorges dam, the Three Gorges families, the Shennong Stream, the Shennongjia Scenic Area, the Memorial Temple of Qu Yuan in Fenghuang Mountain, the Zhaojun Culture Scenic Area, the Three Travellers' Cave (or Sanyou Cave) in Xiling Gorge and the Chexi Tujia Ethnic Customs Cultural Area.

The government will invest a total of 10.37 billion yuan (approx. US$1.38 billion), to be used mainly for road construction, building foundation facilities in cities and towns and protecting cultural heritage and nature.

# Weekend Tour to Yilan

Photos & Article : Mickey Ching



**I often turn to Taipei as my weekend choice for relaxation. Books from Eslite's, coffeehouses, pineapple shortcakes . . . , everything there helps me to enjoy a pleasant and carefree bourgeois life-style for a couple of days. These enjoyments however are far from one's only options. Yilan county is only about a 40 minute drive from Taipei and is a perfect holiday resort with many leisure farms, tea gardens and hot springs. Along the way, there also are activities from which to choose such as whale watching at Kuishan (Turtle Mountain) Island, gondola rides and tea tasting at Maokong.**

It takes less than 40 minutes by highway to go from Taipei to Yilan. The Hsuehshan Tunnel is on the way and is the longest highway tunnel in Taiwan. It has been open to traffic for less than a year. Yilan is a land of abundance. The Chongshan Agricultural Leisure Area, located at Chong Shan village in Dongshan township, is engaged mainly in growing tea and 'Wendan' pomelos. Nearby there are many such leisure farms, tea gardens, fruit orchards and small family-run hotels. They all provide a wide choice of activities, ranging from pomelo flower appreciation, pomelo flower tea tasting, tea leaf picking and tea making to do-it-yourself (DIY) programs such as making tea moon cakes and tea eggs (hard-boiled eggs that have been further simmered in a salted tea broth).

## Making tea eggs at Eshan Tea Farm

First stop on the Chong Shan village tour is Eshan Tea Farm which is rather modest in size. Besides a tea garden, it also offers a series of DIY activities that include making tea and tea eggs. The Chong Shan village is surrounded by mountains on three sides, and its Dongshan River water is of very good quality. These natural features have helped to cultivate the well-known Suqing tea. Its tea leaves are soft and tender producing a sweet, moist taste without leaving a bitterness or pucker in the mouth.

I love eating tea eggs, but this was my first time learning how to flavor and cure the cooked eggs with Suqing tea. This exercise reminded me of a video game called 'Cooking Mama'. The key to success lies in strictly following instructions and correct timing. There are two steps: first, remove the eggshells and soak the boiled eggs in a mixture of tea, salt and granulated sugar for 6 – 8 hours; second, place the well soaked eggs on aluminum foil that is covered with tea and brown sugar and cure them until their colour turns golden yellow. When a ready-to-serve tea egg is sliced, the yellow yolk will slowly flow out. Its faint smoked flavor is unforgettable. The farm owner's wife was most considerate. She specially prepared small boxes of eggs for visitors to take home as souvenirs.

Address: 3 Chong Shan Wulu, Chong
Shan Village, Dongshan
Township, Yilan County
Tel: (886) 03-958 0301

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## Plucking tea leaves at Neishan Tea Garden

'This is a great place,' rings the welcome greeting in local Min-nan dialect from the owner of the Neishan Leisure Tea Garden at its entrance. The tea plantation here has been in existence for two generations. Tea leaves cured with pomelo flowers are its major product, but what attracted me most are the vast stretches of soft green tea bushes. Without hesitation, I dressed up as a tea leaf harvesting girl and went to learn how to pick tea leaves. The secret of doing a good job is to choose bright green leaves, especially the two fresh, tender leaves that fork off the end of stems.

These fresh leaves become edible once covered with flour paste and fried in oil. When flavored with a pomelo vinegar made by the farm owner's wife, it won't taste oily no matter how much you eat. Next to the tea farm is a Wendan Pomelo garden. It costs NT 2,500 (US$76) to buy a tree which then will be taken care of by the farm workers so that you can come again later to harvest your own pomelos for the year's Mid-Autumn Festival.

Address: No. 23, Lane 688, Chong Shan Road, Chong Shan Village, Dongshan
Township, Yilan County
Tel: (886) 03-958 1905

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1. The 'Divine Turtle Wagging Its Tail' is one of the eight scenic wonders of Kuishan (Turtle Mountain) Island.
(Photo courtesy of the Northeast Coast National Scenic Area Administration)
2. DIY: making tea eggs.
3. Suqing tea planted on the Eshan Tea Farm.
4. Learning how to pick tea leaves.
5. Marveling at one's self-made crisp tea leaves.

## Crab Museum at Peikuan Resort

In Yilan, there is a theme resort focusing on marine life. Its name is Peikuan.

Off the northeast coast of the Taiwan, the Kuishan Island area of Yilan County is where the warm Kuroshio Current and the cold Oyashio Current meet. There are more than 60 volcanoes on the seabed there. This has created conditions for the existence of a tremendously rich biodiversity. Almost one-fifth of the world's crustaceans, e.g., shrimps, hermit crabs and other species, can be found in the area. No wonder that Peikuan Resort has the only Crab Museum in Asia.

The resort owner, Li Guanxing, often visited the fishing harbour to buy seafood. One day he came across an Urchin crab *(dorippe frascone)* and this began to arouse his curiosity about crabs. The idea then struck him that he should establish a special a crab museum.

1

The two-storey museum now has collected in separate galleries some 2,000 crab specimens as well as living crabs. Here one comes to know the ancestors of crabs, the fastest crab, the Urchin crab, the Box crab *(Calappa calappa)* and Vent crabs *(Xenograpsus testudinatus)*, the largest crab species in Taiwan. In the living crab section, you may observe carefully various interesting crab behavior such as what the Chinese mitten crabs, more popularly known as hairy crabs *(Eriocheir sinensis)*, look like and their ingenious disguise skills.

Address: 205 Gengsin Road, Toucheng Township, Yilan County
Tel: (886) 03-977 2168
Website: www.peikuan-resort.com.tw

2

1. Mantis shrimp look like dinosaurs.
2. A crab is clawing a teal duck.
3, 4. Both indoor and outdoor hot spring pools are available.

3

## Spa experience at Hotel Royal Chiao Hsi

It's really a pleasant experience to be able to take a luxury, hot spring bath after a tea farm tour.

The Hotel Royal Chiao Hsi in Yilan provides not only deluxe accommodations but also a hot spring resort designed primarily in a Japanese style.

The hotel, in fact, was designed by a Japanese company and built with wood and stones. The landscaped gardens add a Buddhist touch to its simple but elegant architecture.

To be closer to the nature, the hotel has open-air bathing pools, including an herbal pool, an energy pool and some other themed pools. The men's and women's nude bathing pools were made of stone products from Izu in Japan as well as an Yilan local product, a type of sandstone that contains rich iron.

4

This is the first bathing establishment in Taiwan which integrates both indoor and outdoor pools. It's unquestionably a great joy to be able to take in the surrounding mountain and sea scenery while soaking in a hot spring bath.

Address: 69 Wufong Road, Dazhong Village, Jiaosi Township, Yilan County
Tel: (886) 03-988 6288
Website: www.hrjhotel.com.tw

## Kuishan Island: Hiking and Whale Watching

I discovered from talking to local Taiwanese that perhaps as many as two thirds of them never have been to that small but mysterious place, Kuishan (Turtle Mountain) Island. Only 2.85 sq km in size, the island rises up out of the Pacific about 10 km off the coast of Toucheng in Yilan County. From above, as its name implies, it looks like a floating turtle. Climbing up the island used to be very dangerous. As an area under military control, the island was closed for some 20 years before being re-opened to the public in 2000. During the Qing Dynasty the island became well-known for its 'Eight Scenic Wonders', including the 'Sunrise at Turtle Island', the 'Divine Turtle Wagging Its Tail', and the 'Divine Turtle Wearing a Hat'. It also is noted for its ecological abundance that includes the large tree nymph, Taiwan ebony, clumps of wild Chinese fan palm *(Livistona chinensis)* and wild lilies. Today whale watching, hiking around the island and climbing up to the island's highest vantage point are the major activities on offer. The main whale species one can see here are small killer whales, killer whales, false killer whales and humpback whales. This can prove to be an absolutely unforgettable marine eco-tour.

The best way to enjoy the island is actually to hike on it. There are two options: first one may take the walkway around Kuiwei (Turtle Tail) Lake to observe its ecological richness in about half an hour; and/or secondly one can follow the eco-walkway leading to Height 401m where there is a panoramic view of the island and surrounding sea. However the number of visits to the Height is restricted to only 40 per day. Potential visitors are reminded that an application for visiting Kuishan Island must be filed beforehand, and a successful landing on the island depends very much on weather conditions.

Open till the end of November

Website: www.necoast-nsa.gov.tw

Getting There: Take a pleasure fishing boat from Wushi Port, Yilan.

Fee Options: Whale watching plus a tour circling the island lasts about 2 ~ 3 hours and costs NT1,000 (US$30); a tour circling the island and landing on the island requires about 3 hours and also costs NT1,000; a tour circling the island only requires only 1 – 1.5 hours and is priced at NT600 (US$18); whale watching plus landing and walking around the island lasts about 3.5 – 4 hours and costs NT1,600 (US$50).

Information on whale watching: (886) 03-978 2511

Website: www.etcfa.org.tw

**5. A rare tour around the island. (Photo courtesy of Northeast Coast National Scenic Area Administration)**

**6. Turtle Island is also a good place to watch dolphins. (Photo courtesy of Northeast Coast National Scenic Area Administration)**

**7. What a fairyland-like tea garden!**

**8. Maokong gondola, a must to take.**

### Morning Sun Teahouse

Address: No. 53, Lane 34, Block 3, Zhinan Road, Muzha, Wenshan District

Tel: (886) 02-2936 4336

### Sandunshi Teapots Museum

Address: No. 36, Lane 34, Block 3, Zhinan Road, Muzha, Wenshan District

Tel: (886) 02-2938 3797

### Maokong Gondola

Operation hours: 10:00 - 20:00

Tickets: NT30~50 (US 90¢F~$1.50)

Tel: (886) 02-2938 2626

Website: www.mkc.com.tw

8

## Fly over Maokong Gondola

On the way back to Taipei from Yilan, I visited Maokong, a small valley east of the Muzha tea-growing area in Wenshan, Taipei Municipality. The land within this valley is soft and spongy. The valley's riverbed, lashed by currents and loose boulders for years, has eroded into a huge sinking hollow. The rough surface of flowing water thus looks like scratches made by cat (mao) paws. Maokong actually has become famous for its production of Tieguanyin tea. Its fertile land and cool, limpid waters have nurtured a particularly high-quality strain of tea. Maokong is now one of the largest tea production districts in Taiwan.

There are at least 50 – 60 teahouses along the mountain highway to Maokong. Morning Sun Teahouse is a good choice allowing visitors to enjoy a broad view of the vast stretches of mountain terrain, open country and tea gardens. Adjacent to this tea garden is the Sandunshi Teapot Museum where all the boccaro ware collected by Mr. Zhang Kunhong is on display. Mr. Zhang's family has been living in Maokong for generations.

In June, the first government-funded cable car system in Taiwan went into operation at Maokong. It now takes only 5 minutes for tourists to reach the tea farms.

*Translated by Chen Qiuping*

# Tasty Lanzhou Noodles

Article & Photos • Wu Pingguan

It goes without saying, different places have different cuisine.

In China, people from the south usually eat rice, while people from the north eat flour products (breads and noodles). Lanzhou is famous for flour products, such as Lanzhou beef noodles, jiangshui (fermented soup) noodles, rice noodles, seasoned minced meat noodles and noodles served with gravy.

Beef Noodles 2.5~3 yuan / bowl

## Delicious Beef Noodles

Beef noodles are an extremely, if not the most, economic home-style food in Lanzhou. With only a few yuan you can fill your stomach with tasty noodles. If you visit Lanzhou, don't pass up the chance to try the authentic Lanzhou beef noodles.

The secret of Lanzhou noodles lies in the soup. Since Ma Baozi, the creator of beef noodles made his first wok of beef noodle soup, the ingredients have been passed down from generation to generation. As well as beef, the soup is made from dozens of ingredients; the noodles are made fresh on the spot in less than two minutes. Once the noodles are finished, the cook will put the pre-made beef soup, cooked parsnip slices, handful of diced beef, green cilantro and onion on top, then flavour the soup with a little red sesame and pepper oil. They are presented very well. Lanzhou beef noodles can be categorized into many kinds by the width of noodles or the portion size. Some noodles can be as wide as two adult's fingers or as thin as a toothpick and anywhere in between. The five most important components of this signature noodle dish are the cow-bone broth, parsnip slices, red pepper oil, green cilantro and onion.

Jiangshui Noodles 2.5~3 yuan / bowl

## Sour Jiangshui Noodles

What is sour jiangshui (fermented soup)? It doesn't sound all that appetizing, but Lanzhou people seem addicted to it. Curiously, the creation of jiangshui is closely linked to the geographical features of northwest China. It's made like this: first prepare a pot and add a bowl of pre-made jiangshui to it. Boil some vegetables such as celery, parsnip or sweet potato and add a little noodle water; pour the vegetables and water into the pot after cooling for a while. Finally, mix everything in the pot and cover it. During winter, the pot should be kept warm and wrapped in a quilt. It should then be left sitting for three days next to the stove. In summer, it doesn't need to be wrapped. It is not only a staple food, but also a drink which can relieve internal heat and smooth your intestines and lungs. It has been jokingly called the 'Chinese coca-cola.'

There are many ways to prepare jiangshui noodles. If you prefer a lighter flavour, you can just boil some jiangshui with stir-fried green onion, then pour the soup on top of the noodles or you can simply boil the jiangshui noodles. The noodles made in these two ways are better served after eating oily food like lamb because they can help digestion. Another way to make jiangshui noodles is to cook it with beef. First you need to stir-fry minced beef and green onion, then boil them in jiangshui, making the noodle soup. Beef and jiangshui complement each other very well. In summer, if you're craving meat, but don't want anything greasy, treat yourself to these noodles.

I had heard of these famous jiangshui noodles before, but never tried them. At Longshang Jiangshuiyuan Restaurant in Lanzhou, I tried the light-flavoured, yet savoury and sour, jiangshui noodles. The noodles there are hand-made. When the cook finishes kneading the dough, he presses it into a thin layer then folds it and cuts it into slices as thin as matches. The jiangshui is boiled with stir-fried green onion, Chinese prickly ash and ground ginger. The boiled noodles are then rinsed with cold water in order to get rid of the surface stickiness. Afterwards, the jiangshui soup should be poured onto the noodles; then just add some pepper oil and cilantro, and a bowl of colourful, appetizing noodles is ready. Since jiangshui noodles are lightly flavoured, people usually serve them with dishes like Longxi smoked meat or cold-served cucumber. In the restaurant where I tried it, they served it with boiled marinated pig's feet.

## Spicy Cold Noodles

Cold noodles are a famous local snack in northwest China. In Lanzhou, eating cold noodles is part of everyday life. It's not unusual to come across nicely dressed women eating spicy cold noodles, with their tongues hanging out, panting and sweating. Cold noodles are made from wheat. They are off-white, semi-transparent and taste smooth, soft and cold. They're generally seasoned with pepper oil, vinegar, garlic, mustard, sesame sauce, soy sauce and salt.

Cold Noodles 1.5~2 yuan / bowl

Saozi Noodles 3~5 yuan / bowl

## Savoury Saozi Noodles

It is said that saozi (seasoned minced meat) noodles are derived from the Longevity Noodles of the Tang Dynasty (618 — 907). They are must-have food on birthdays because they symbolize 'happiness and longevity'. In the past, in Lanzhou, what made a good housewife was whether she could cook delicious saozi noodles. As this kind of noodle is taught to all women in families, the cooking skills and the taste varies. The carefully prepared saozi is made by stir-frying minced pork, citron daylily, agaric (black tree fungus), egg, diced tofu, garlic sprouts and spices. When making the noodle dough, salt water is usually used. Once the dough is finished, they roll it out thin, and then hold the rolling pin with one hand as a guide and cut along the pin. They have an interesting nickname for this cutting technique, — 'ploughing.' After the noodles are boiled, the saozi will be added on top of them. You can add salt or other spices according to your own tastes.

*Translated by Nichole Ouyang*

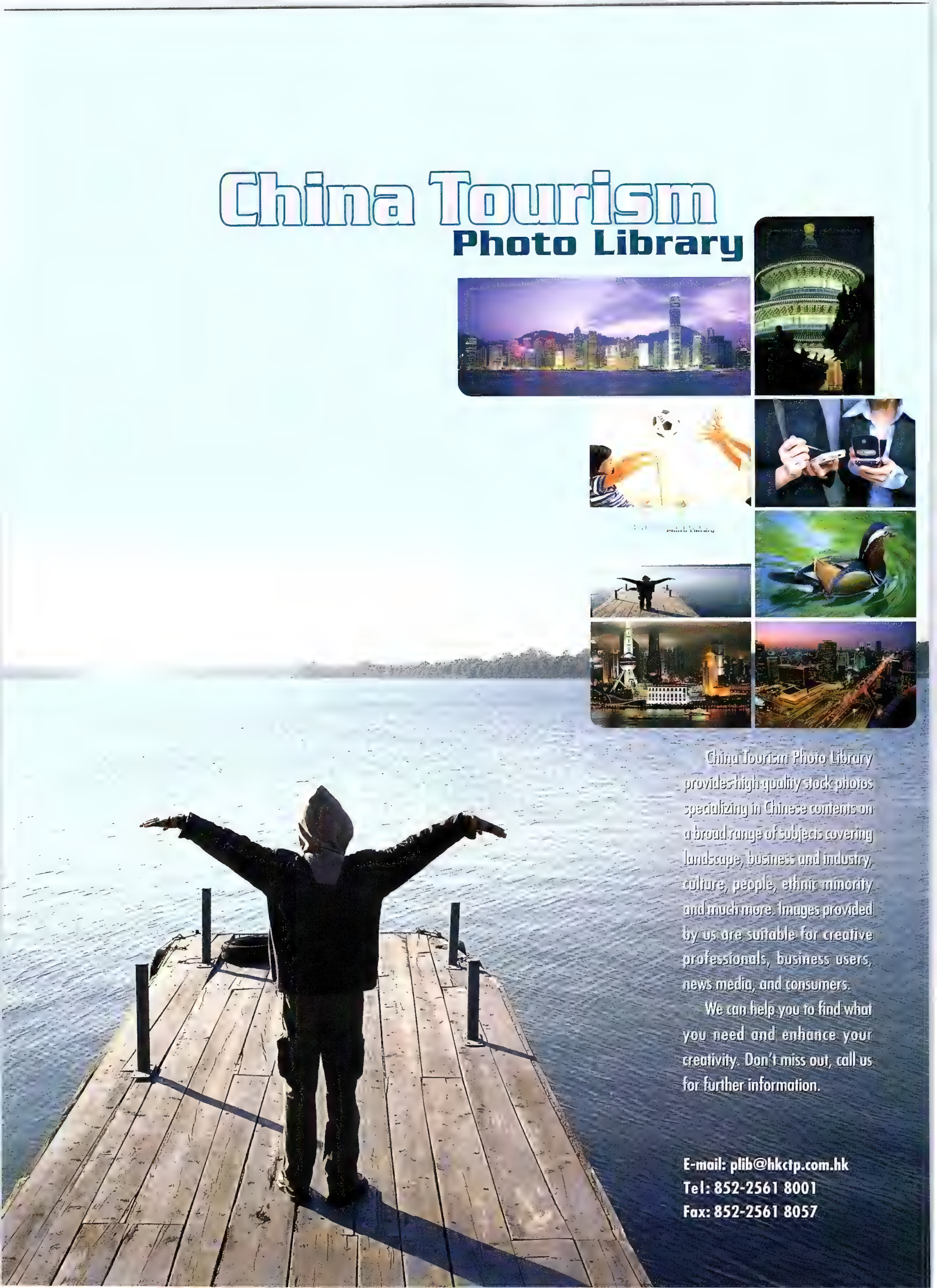
### Where to dine?

If you have limited time, but still like to try many different types of noodles, I'd recommend this restaurant:

Longshang Jiangshuiyuan

Address: No. 7 Dixiangzi, Southern Guangchang Road, Chengguan District, Lanzhou

Tel: (0931)8874 1114



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11 ~ 18 Nov **Macau**

## Macau Grand Prix

It is probably the most internationally known event produced in Macau, because of its quality and of its history of. The 54th Macau Grand Prix will be held in November from 15th to 18th.The Grand Prix is in fact a set of car and motorcycle races in city circuit. During the days of the Grand Prix the city lives an extraordinary excitement: the noise of the engines, the crowds of tourists, the colourful decoration of the streets. All changes the rhythm of life during one week.

23 ~ 29 Nov **Guangdong**

## 2007 Guangdong International Tourism and Culture Festival

The Festival sets its main venue in Guangzhou and other venues in various parts in Guangzhou.Activities in Guangdong include International Tourism Fair, Tourism Promotion & International Travel Exposition, PPRD Tourism Floats Parade, Lingnan Folk Arts Joint Performance and Guangdong Tour of Overseas Chinese Celebrities. Meanwhile, various activities will stage in other cities, such as the 8th Pengcheng Golden Fall Festival in Shenzhen, 'Love & Share' Beach Music Party in Zhuhai, Wushu Cultural Festival and Gala Celebration in Foshan, International Culture Festival of Water in Heyuan, Celebrations for the Entry of Kaiping Castles on World Heritage List in Jiangmen..etc. Don't miss these wonderful events in the golden season of autumn.

14 ~ 17 Dec **Taipei**

## Taipei International Travel Fair

Taipei ITF 2007, held from December 14 to 17 this year at Taipei World Trade Center Exhibition Hall, is one of the most important travel events in Asia. There were 601 organizations/companies from 58 countries and areas participated last year. The Taipei ITF 2006 was held from November 3 to 6 at Taipei World Trade Center Exhibition Hall I. More than 3,500 delegates representing 912 organizations from 58 countries/regions attended the show. Total of 1,150 booths have been taken up. The four days' show attracted 172,280 visitors of which 20,645 were from the travel industry.

**2007**

**NOV/DEC**

5 ~ 8 Nov **Huangping**

## Lusheng Festival

Join the ethnic Miao groups in Guizhou Province, and celebrate this colorful courting party replete with exciting bullfights, horse races, Lusheng (a traditional musical instrument) playing, singing contests, costume shows and traditional dancing. Girls wear intricate silver head-dresses and beautiful embroidered costumes to attract their future husbands, and they will sing and share their wine with visitors too!

16 ~ 18 Nov **Xinjiang**

## 2nd Xinjiang Winter Expo

The Xinjiang Tourism Bureau is hosting its second winter expo at Xinjiang International Exhibition Center. The expo is divided intio three parts, namely exhibition, competition and conference. The exhibition will include display of winter travel, skiing equipment, outdoor sports products, souvenir, Xinjiang cuisine, catering contest, etc., all of which are highlights of the snowy Xinjiang. Their aim is to attract more business and enhance the uprising Xinjiang winter tourism. Up till 2006, Xinjiang's visitor figure has reached 9.6 million, while in the 1990's, the figure was nearly zero!

Oct ~ Nov **Hangzhou**

## 2007 Hangzhou China (International) Food Festival

The Festival will be held at Dragon Sports Centre with the theme, 'leisure delicacies, life quality'. In addition to promoting the catering industry, the festival consists of 4 sub-programs: Exhibition and Sales of China's Famous Snacks, Selection of the 'China Delicacies — Hangzhou West Lake Top Feast', Selection of the famous restaurants in Hangzhou and Development Forum of the Catering Industry in Hangzhou.

# READERSHIP SURVEY

Our readers' ideas and opinions are important to us. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine. Thank you!

### 1. What did you enjoy about this issue (E312) and why?

______________________________

______________________________

### 2. Was there anything about this issue that you thought could be improved?

______________________________

______________________________

### 3. Where did you first encounter *China Tourism*?

☐ Subscription ☐ Newsstand ☐ From friends ☐ Bookstore (Name of bookstore: ____________ )
☐ Hotel (Name of hotel: ____________ ) ☐ Airline VIP lounge (Name of airline: ____________ )

### 4. Why do you read *China Tourism*?

☐ Planning trips ☐ Business ☐ General Interest ☐ Other

### 5. How long have you been reading *China Tourism*?

☐ Since the beginning ☐ Less than 3 years ☐ 3 ~ 5 years ☐ 6 ~ 9 years ☐ More than 10 years

### 6. Which *China Tourism* articles are you most interested in reading?

☐ Book Review ☐ Challenges ☐ City Snaps ☐ Culture ☐ Customs
☐ Discovery ☐ Editorial ☐ Excursions ☐ Feature Story ☐ HK Mosaic
☐ Hotel Picks ☐ Landscapes ☐ Nature ☐ New Attractions ☐ On the Way
☐ Profile ☐ Traveller's Corner ☐ Others: ____________

### 7. What information or topics you would like *China Tourism* to cover in the future?

______________________________

### 8. What are your suggestions for improving the magazine?

______________________________

### 9. How many times have you visited China?

☐ Less than 3 times ☐ 3 ~ 5 times ☐ More than 5 times

### 10. What is your favourite destination in China? ____________

### 11. What other travel- or China-related publications do you read?

☐ Traveller (National Geographic) ☐ China Today ☐ China Pictorial ☐ Action Asia
☐ Hong Kong Discovery ☐ HK Magazine ☐ Culture Hong Kong ☐ Others: ____________

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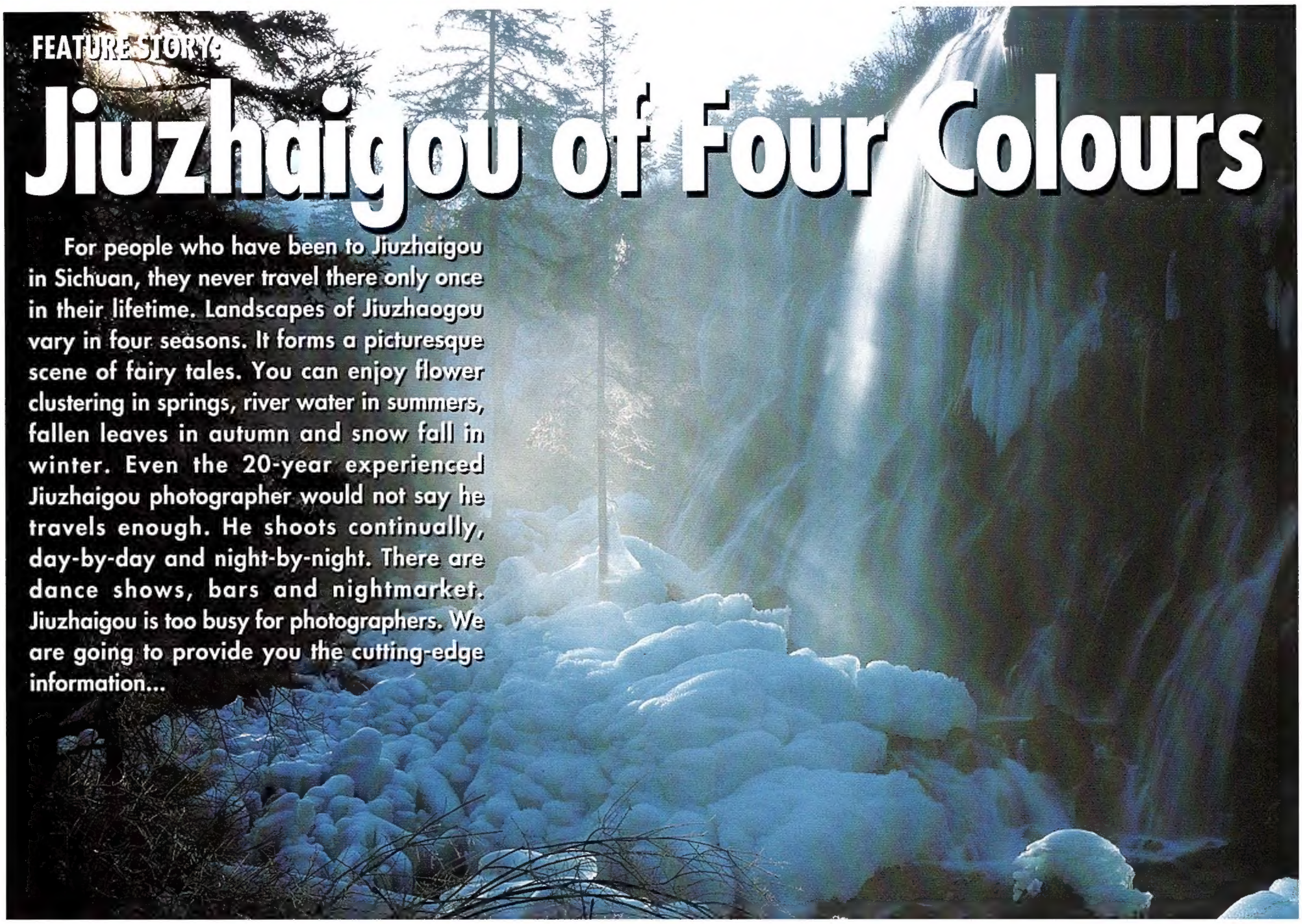

FEATURE STORY:

# Jiuzhaigou of Four Colours

For people who have been to Jiuzhaigou in Sichuan, they never travel there only once in their lifetime. Landscapes of Jiuzhaogou vary in four seasons. It forms a picturesque scene of fairy tales. You can enjoy flower clustering in springs, river water in summers, fallen leaves in autumn and snow fall in winter. Even the 20-year experienced Jiuzhaigou photographer would not say he travels enough. He shoots continually, day-by-day and night-by-night. There are dance shows, bars and nightmarket. Jiuzhaigou is too busy for photographers. We are going to provide you the cutting-edge information...

**On the Way**

## Fun Kashi

Kashi means 'city of jade' in the Uygur language. Kashi was an important stop on the ancient 'silk road', even now, it still plays an integral role in trade with west Asian countries. There are 26 ethnic groups living in Yunnan, but Kashi takes the cake — with 32 ethnic groups calling it home, that's more than half of China's 56 ethnic groups.

**Culture**

## Chenlu — an Ancient Town for Celadon

Chenlu, a little town adjoins the southern tip of the Loess Plateau and the northern part of the Guanzhong Plain. From thousands of years to now, fire from here burn unceasingly. It breaks the longest record of burning ceramics. Ceramists of Chenlu still practice with the primitive craftsmanship of ceramics making; whilst the architectural styles of Chenlu residences, proved to be the 'museum' of restored ancient ceramics.

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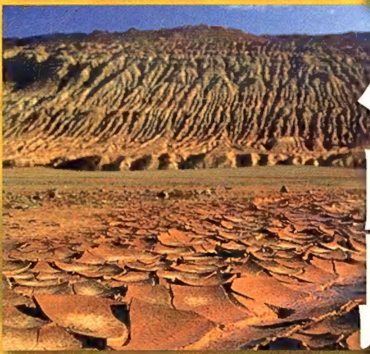

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